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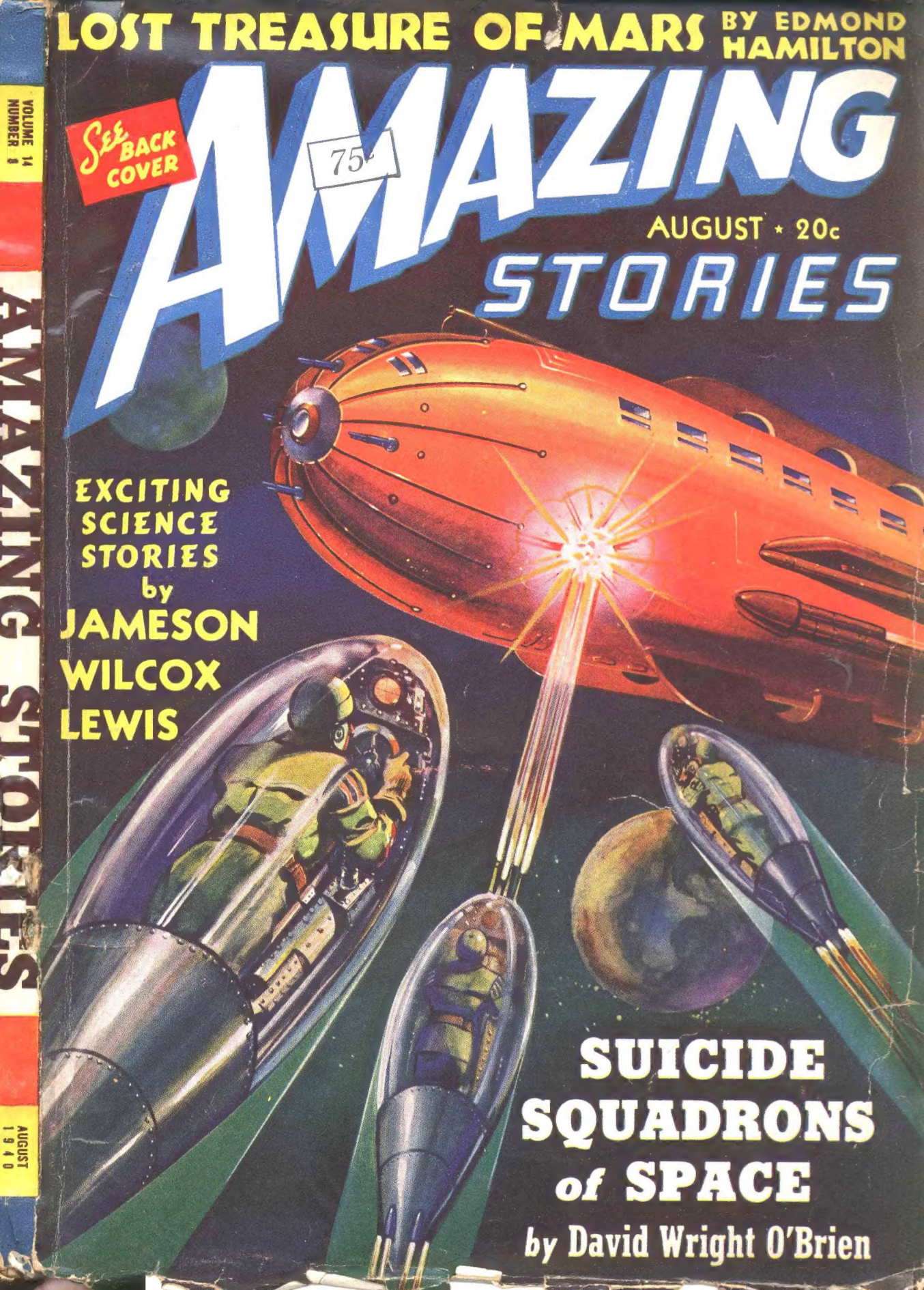

SUICIDE SQUADRONS of SPACE

by David Wright O'Brien

VOLUME 14 NUMBER 8

AMAZING STORIES

AUGUST 1940

GOOD BYE DANDRUFF SYMPTOMS!

THE TREATMENT

MEN: Douse full strength Listerine Antiseptic on the scalp morning and night.

WOMEN: Part the hair at various places, and apply Listerine Antiseptic right along the part with a medicine dropper, to avoid wetting the hair excessively.

Always follow with vigorous and persistent massage with fingers or a good hair brush. Continue the treatment so long as dandruff is in evidence. And even though you're free from dandruff, enjoy a Listerine massage once a week to guard against infection. Listerine is the same antiseptic that has been famous for more than 50 years as a mouth wash and gargle.

Soothing Listerine Antiseptic Treatment gives hair and scalp antiseptic bath . . . kills millions of germs associated with infectious dandruff

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Listerine Antiseptic kills millions of the germs associated with the infectious type of dandruff—an all too common form of this scalp condition. It destroys, on contact, countless numbers of these tiny, almost invisible parasites, including the queer "bottle bacillus," called Pityrosporum Ovale, which outstanding specialists recognize as a causative agent of infectious dandruff.

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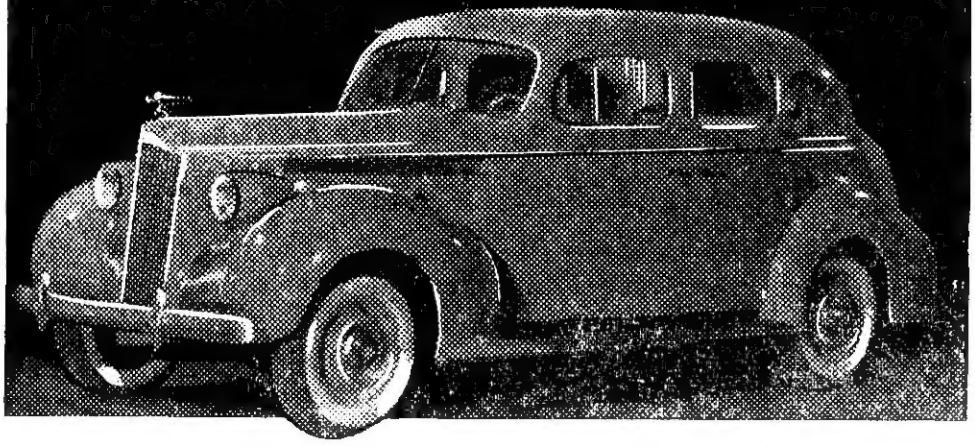

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AUGUST
1940

AMAZING STORIES

VOLUME 14
NUMBER 8

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Front cover painting by Leo Morey & Julian S. Krupa depicting a scene from Suicide Squadrons of Space
Back cover painting by Frank R. Paul

Illustrations by Julian S. Krupa, Will Panak, H. R. Hammond, Dick Shaw, Joe Sewell

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Volume XIV Number 8

SOME months ago we ran a story by Richard O. Lewis about a Dr. Penwing, who said the earth was on the surface of the inside of a hollow ball, and that the whole known universe was also inside that ball. "Phooey," said our readers, "it isn't so!" And they proved it. But they *liked* the story, so this month we present Mr. Lewis again, with the second exploit of the screw-loose Dr. Penwing, and this time he's gone to the *outside* of this ball, and into a new universe! We hope you like it.

LAST December we presented a space ship cover which was very well liked. This month we have another, which is unusual because it was executed by *two* artists! Julian S. Krupa put the finishing touches to Leo Morey's original painting, and the result is your front cover illustrating David Wright O'Brien's "Suicide Squadron of Space."

"I *would* forget to install a static eliminator!"

ONE of our readers writes in and says: "I just read A. R. Steber's story in the July issue, and it hit me right between the eyes. Edgar Bergen ought to give AMAZING STORIES a nice insurance premium for insuring Charlie's future! Let's have more of this kind of story. They're lots of fun!"

IN THE same mail we got a letter from the author, who explains that he met Charlie personally in a theatre in Milwaukee, where the original "Charlie on the operating table" act was the feature of the bill. "So," says Steber, "when you asked me for a yarn, I thought I'd have a little fun doing it, and tried to figure out where I'd gotten the most laughs in my life. Charlie was it. I hope the readers don't laugh at me!"

Which letter leads us to make an interesting observation. Isn't it strange that your editor also met the famous ventriloquist and his more famous dummy in the *same city*, and more than likely, in the same theatre? An odd coincidence!

IN THE April Observatory we mentioned the fact that Princeton was making a study of the Orson Welles "Invasion From Mars" scare, and we now can add to that bit of news. Princeton observers have completed their observations and the result is a 280 page book on what a bunch of gullibles we are! That's capitalizing on science fiction fans with a vengeance!

The most interesting feature of this bit of news is the fact that we got the announcement in the form of a folder which bore on the opposite side a blurb about a book on filibustering in the senate.

Next time a filibuster starts, the senator ought to read a copy of AMAZING STORIES to the senate. We fans weren't fooled for a minute by Welles!

ROCKET shells are a possibility! So says test pilot H. Lloyd Child, who dove a Curtis Hawk 75-A pursuit 18,000 feet and attained a speed of more than 600 miles an hour.

An army automatic pistol, .45 calibre, fires a bullet at 475 miles an hour, muzzle velocity. Draw your own conclusions.

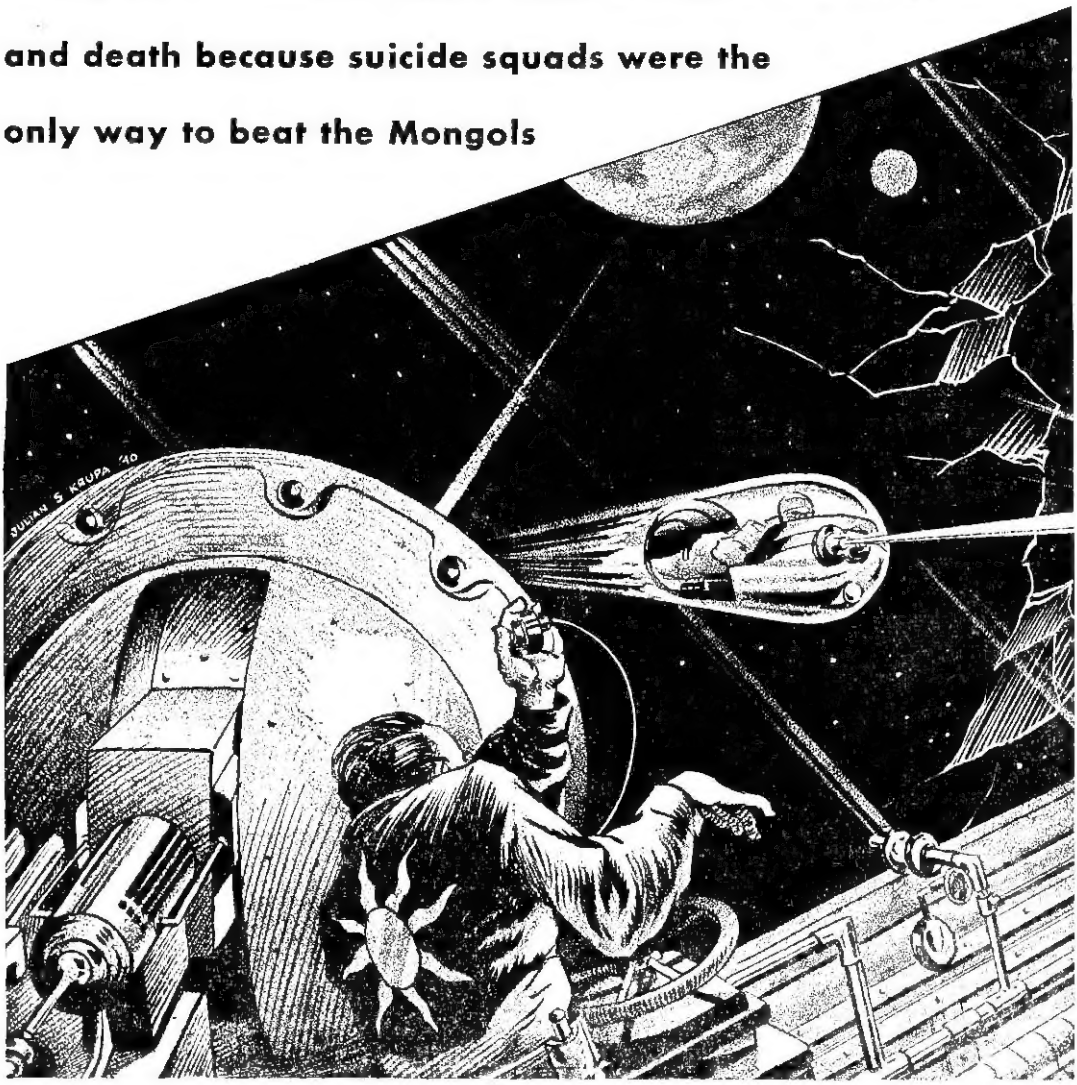
AND now comes Dr. Robert A. Millikan to blast some of our dreams. He tells us that he believes cosmic rays will never be harnessed.

(*Continued on Page* 130)

SUICIDE SQUADRONS OF SPACE

by David Wright O'Brien

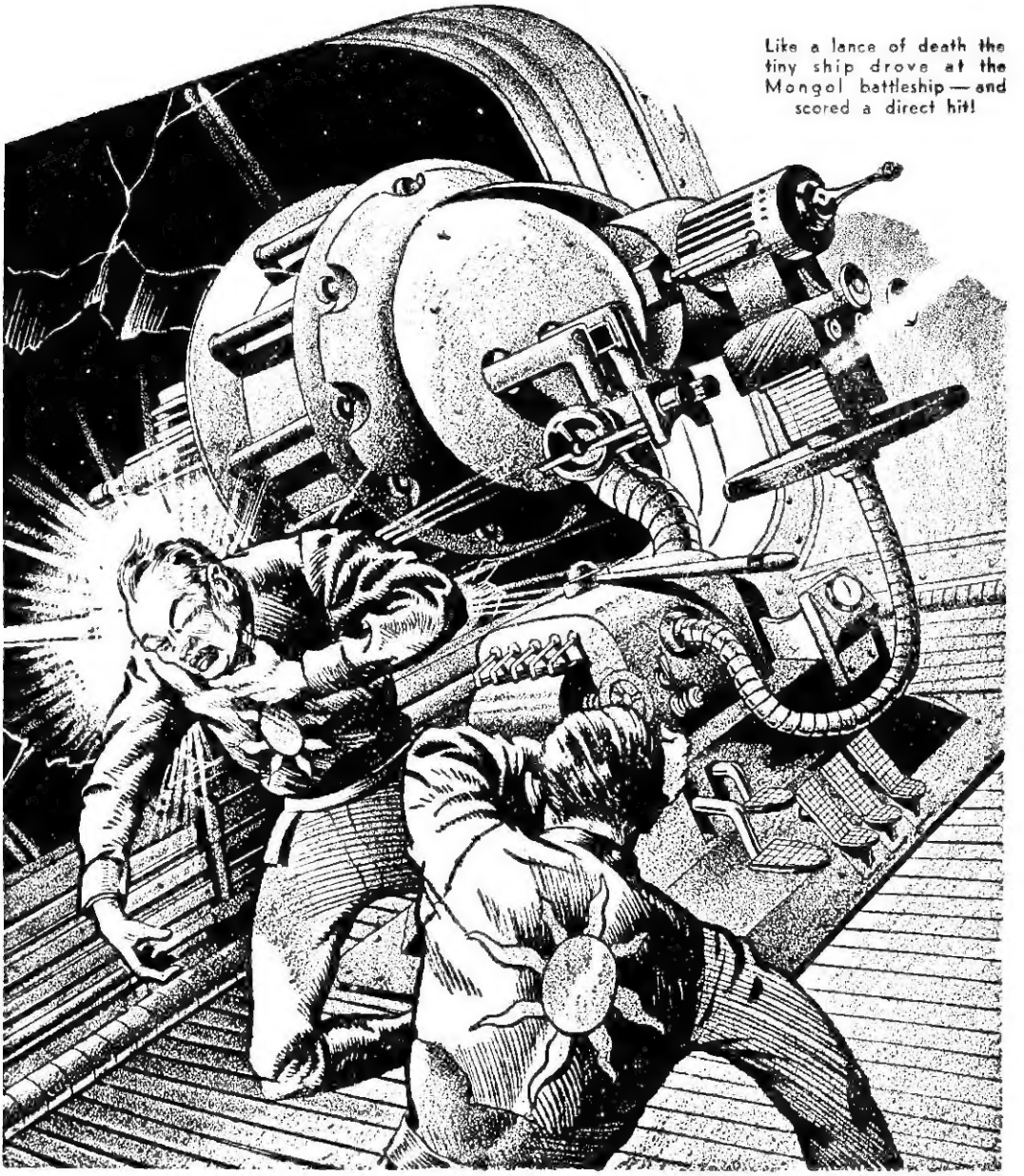
Craig Starke couldn't stand between his kid brother and death because suicide squads were the only way to beat the Mongols



"I SUPPOSE," said the flight commander, "that you officers are the replacements I asked for."

Then he thought to himself: "Why in hell does War College insist on sending these punks up to the front? The poor kids are just babies. Fresh and eager, with no idea in the world of what they're getting in for. They probably think war in space is a glorious adventure."

For a moment the tall, lean-muscled flight commander stood silently behind his desk, his tired gray eyes moving in restless appraisal over the four uniformed young men standing at rigid attention before him. With a gesture of infinite weariness, he rubbed a strong



Like a lance of death the tiny ship drove at the Mongol battleship — and scored a direct hit!

brown hand across the bronzed and hardened lines of his still youthful features.

"I suppose, too, that your instructors at War College recommended you all very highly."

Noticing the flush of embarrassment that crossed the faces of the young officers, the flight commander softened his tone.

"There was no contempt intended in my statement, gentlemen. I was merely thinking of my own days in War College. That wasn't so long ago, y'know."

Again the flight commander thought to himself:

"No, that wasn't so long ago. Just [illegible] years. I was a punk then, too. The Fou[illegible] World War* was in its fortieth year, t[illegible]. Now it's been going on for fifty years. I'm only thirty years old, and I feel like a hundred."

Suddenly the flight commander broke off his thoughts abruptly. For the first time, he noticed that there were only four of the young replacement officers standing before him.

"Where is your other fellow officer?" he asked a blond, smooth-cheeked lad standing nearest to him. "There were supposed to be five replacements, not four."

The pink-skinned youth spoke promptly.

"Commander Walters detained him, sir. He is to join us shortly."

The flight commander nodded. "I see. Well, let's get down to introductions, gentlemen. As you all know, my name is Starke, Flight Commander Craig Starke. I'll be in charge while we're all together." He paused. "Sound off your own names, gentlemen."

"Chanes, sir," said the young officer who had spoken a moment before. Then, in succession, the other three junior officers gave their names, eagerly and with pride.

Flight Commander Starke smiled for the first time since the replacements stepped into his office.

"Very well, gentlemen. I'm more than certain we'll get along splendidly. Return to your quarters. I'll expect you all out at assembly in the morning. Never forget, we're fighting a war!"

The replacements were pushing out through the door when Craig Starke spoke again.

"By the way, Chanes, what is the name of the fifth officer?"

Chanes appeared slightly embarrassed.

"Lieutenant Dick Starke, sir. Your brother!" Then he was gone.

Craig Starke sank slowly back in his swivel-chair, an expression of mingled anger, amazement and shock crossing his features. He ran his hand through his lank black hair, and the line of his jaw slowly hardened, set.

For fully five minutes he remained as he was, staring at the door. His brother, Dick. He hadn't seen Dick in ten years; no, twelve. Dick was a young, blond, smiling kid, gray-eyed and stocky—almost the opposite of his elder brother—when he'd seen him last. Dick was going to be a doctor. Had said so, dedicated his youth to it.

CRAIG STARKE, pleased that the kid wasn't going to carry on the family's hidebound Army tradition, had financed that medical education. Four times a year, for the past eleven years, Dick had written him, had spoken eagerly of his medical training. But in-

* The Fourth World War started in the year 2500—the 26th century—with the United States against the Mongol hordes, who had conquered all of Earth except this country. In their onward sweep of conquest, the yellow legions had seized the interplanetary colonies of all nations except Space Base 10, a U. S. possession, where the action in this story takes place. The Asiatic hordes are being led by Kama Khan, a direct descendant of his famous forerunner, Genghis Khan.—Ed.

stead, he had gone to War College—and was now assigned to Space Base 10 under his elder brother's command.

Burning rage replaced all other of Craig Starke's emotions, and his big brown hands squeezed hard on the edge of his desk. Dick, the kid he'd been so blastedly proud of, had betrayed him!

Several moments must have passed before Flight Commander Starke heard the knocking on his door. Setting his jaw grimly, he forced himself to keep his voice steady.

"Come in," he barked.

And Lieutenant Dick Starke stepped into the room.

"Craig!" There was joy as well as embarrassment in the younger officer's voice. "Dammit, it's grand to see you, Craig!"

Craig Starke stared frostily at his brother, unconsciously noting the changes in the kid. He was a little taller now, still shorter than Craig though, and was even wider, more muscular than before. His hair hadn't darkened. In fact it was almost a white-blond now. The grin that had jumped so eagerly to his face was now sliding sickly away as Dick noted the expression in his brother's eyes.

"You're sore, Craig. Sore as hell. But I can expl—"

"Lieutenant Starke?" His brother's voice broke in sharply, giving the other no time to finish. "Lieutenant Starke," he repeated, letting the icy formality of the tone sink in, "you are with the new replacement officers, I believe."

"Look, Craig," his younger brother started again, a sort of desperation in his voice.

"It is customary, Lieutenant Starke," the other went on, "to address your superior officers by title." His voice became heavy with sarcasm. "I suppose your instructors at War College taught you as much."

Lieutenant Dick Starke snapped rigidly to attention, his eyes the only remaining indication of the emotion that filled him.

"As I was saying," Craig Starke grated, "you are with the new replacement officers. All of you are new to the front, new to war of any sort other than the bosh they hand you in school. This is space war, Lieutenant. In case you're not aware of it—it's sheer unadulterated hell up here. The invaders play for keeps, and kill to stay killed."

He paused, seemingly calmer, but his big hands still gripped the edges of his desk fiercely.

"You are also a bit worn out by your journey from Earth, I presume. Go to the quarters I have assigned the others. That's all!"

Lieutenant Dick Starke seemed to hesitate for a moment, debating against the rage of his brother and the futility of his own explanations. Then he did a smart about-face, after saluting, and was gone.

For endless seconds after his brother had left him, Craig Starke sat leaning back in his swivel-chair, staring blankly at the paneled pattern of the ceiling. At last, aloud, he said:

"So he wants to play soldier, eh? Wants to kill rather than heal. Well, dammit, he won't play soldier under *my* command! I'll get him out of here faster than a rocket charge!"

ONCE more in his rôle of flight commander, Starke leaned forward, flicking the switch on the televisor box that sat on his desk. There was a static spluttering, then the white screen glowed orange, finally pale gray, rugged features taking form on it.

Craig Starke looked at the face of the Base senior officer, old "Iron" Walters. The venerable Army officer's profile was seamed with the brown ruts

that only space war can sear into a man, and his thick white drooping mustache bobbed as he spoke.

"Well, Starke?"

"Wanted to talk to you, sir," Starke replied. "It's about my brother, just arrived with the new replacements. I want him transferred out of here, immediately!"

"Why?" There was amazement in the senior officer's voice, on his stony features.

"He doesn't belong here," Craig Starke insisted. "It's not right that he should serve under me. The other officers will think—"

"To hell with what the other officers think! They shan't have a chance to think of anything. I was the one who had your brother Richard assigned here. Thought it would surprise and please you, don't y'know."

The older officer's face beamed pontifically out of the televisor box.

"Didn't suspect he was at War College, eh?" Senior Officer Walters winked slyly. "Knew it would please you, however. Both my daughter and I were sure that it would be stupid for a Starke to become a sawbones. Not in the breed. Too many Starkes have been damned fine soldiers, to have one go to pot as a medico. Knew he belonged in the Army. We convinced him, daughter and I. See you at mess."

The box spluttered once again, then paled, the vision of the venerable officer's face fading away.

Flight Commander Craig Starke rose to his feet, cursing. So that was the way the wind blew! The damned meddling old fossil had been the cause of Dick's deserting the medical profession. Commander Walters was so filled with the Army he couldn't see anything else. And his daught—

Starke stopped short. That was it. She was the cause of it! Old Iron Walters would never have lured Dick away from medicine, but his pretty daughter, Bea, could wrap Dick around her little finger.

Craig Starke suddenly remembered at least ten mentions of the girl's name in his brother's letters to him. So Dick had fallen for Bea, and she had talked him into the change. And Bea Walters, daughter of the Base commander, was here with her father. It all added up perfectly!

Flight Commander Craig Starke seized his uniform cap, slammed it on the back of his head, and stalked out of his office. He knew, as he strode angrily past the space ship hangars and on through the officers' dining room, toward Officers' Row, that he was going to have it out with Miss Bea Walters.

CHAPTER II

Catastrophe

WHEN Lieutenant Dick Starke arrived at Officers' Quarters, he found that his room had already been arranged for by young Chanes. The two of them were to share the same place. Chanes was sprawled comfortably out on the cot by the window, smoking a cigarette and turning his head occasionally to watch the mechanics working over the space combat ships at the far end of the hangars.

Wordlessly, Dick threw his luggage beneath his own cot and proceeded to remove his military dress tunic. Then he sat down on the cot occupied by Chanes, letting his head rest in his hands.

"Didn't work out so well, eh, Dick?" Chanes observed sympathetically. "Five will get you ten that he wouldn't even let you explain."

"No," the younger Starke said dis-

mally. "He wouldn't give me the chance to say a word."

Chanes was thoughtful, rubbing his jaw in mute contemplation.

"If you don't mind my saying so, he's a helluva tough baby—even for a flight commander."

Dick shrugged. "He's been up here ten years, don't forget."

"Yeah," Chanes replied. "I guess ten years at the front can process any given material into steel." He proffered a pack of smokes to Dick. "Have one."

There was a minute of silence, as young Starke lighted his cigarette, broken at length by Chanes' next remark.

"Seen Bea Walters yet?"

At the mention of the name, Dick Starke seemed to brighten perceptibly.

"No," he answered. "But I'll get a chance to see her after mess this evening."

Chanes smiled. "I envy you, fella. Not only have you got one of the swellest-looking *femmes* in the cosmos, but you're lucky enough to have her as the daughter of an Army commander, living with her daddy at the same Base you're stationed at."

Dick Starke disregarded the levity in his companion's tones, frowning as he answered,

"I don't know, Chanes. Bea's being up here at the front with her dad worries me. I don't like it. Supposing the invaders get wind of the Base location and come over to sprinkle their radium bombs on us. This isn't exactly a safe place for a woman."

"Old Iron Walters isn't going to let his daughter stay around, if there's even the remotest chance that such a thing might happen," Chanes assured him. "No, I imagine we're pretty damned safe from the invaders. It'll be a long time before they locate this base. We're so well hidden that—"

Chanes broke off abruptly. His gesturing hand paused in mid-air, and he looked sharply, quizzically at his new roommate.

"What's that?" he demanded.

Dick Starke stared at him. "What's that?"

Chanes' forehead was wrinkled, and excitement tinged his face.

"Listen," he repeated. "Can't you hear it? Atomic motors overhead! Lots of them, from the sound. I think—"

The rest of his sentence was drowned in the wail of raid sirens, dismally screeching out their warnings of death and danger above. Chanes and Dick Starke were on their feet instantly, grabbing tunics and dashing for the door.

"An attack!" Dick shouted. "The invaders are above the Base!"

"Wow!" shouted Chanes. "Action at last!"

THE two young officers were already dashing down the long barracks corridor. Other doors along the hall were flying open, and more figures emerged in hurried excitement. There was an increasing babble of voices, and through the same amplifier that had sounded the siren warnings, there came the staccato piping of a bugle.

"Assembly, before the hangars," Chanes gasped into Dick's ear. "Hot damn, we're going up after 'em!"

Most of the flight officers were already lined up before the space ship hangars when Dick and Chanes arrived. Dick saw that his brother was already on the scene, moving quietly up and down the line, issuing orders to men and mechanics. Hangar turrets were rolling up, and bullet-nosed, sleek-lined space combat ships were being rolled forth.

As Flight Commander Craig Starke

went down the line of officers, speaking to all in turn, each man fell out of line and made for the combat rockets assigned to him. Dick and Chanes had joined the line at the far end. Finally, however, Starke was before them. He was calm, cool, and might have been lecturing a student group for all his manner.

"Chanes," he said softly. "You'll report to the commandant's office with Starke and the other replacements who arrived today. I'm not sending any of you up on this flight. You haven't had time to adjust yourselves to our conditions yet."

Enthusiasm drained from the faces of the two younger officers like water from a leaky bucket. Disappointment was clearly written in their every expression.

Dully then the pair fell out of line and began trotting in the direction of the commandant's office. Neither spoke, each was too full of his own bitterness. They were lost to the furor around them.

Then the first radium bomb fell.

It came with a singing, screaming, tearing impact, landing far to the left of the hangars. The detonation was terrific, hurling both Dick and Chanes to the ground, spreading orange flame in every direction.

Dick's ears rang deafeningly, and blood trickled slowly from the corners of his nose and mouth. Somewhere, the scream of a man in horrible agony drifted past. The raid siren was wailing once more. An Emergency Squad Unit passed by, ten men bearing stretchers and apparatus. Chanes was on his feet again, and Dick regained his.

Now the atomic motors of the Base's own combat ships were sputtering angrily, and the reverberations of their engines smashed the air as they climbed spaceward. One after another, the sleek combat space ships left the ground; streaks that zipped, became dwarfed, then vanished into the fog of the upper strata.

Dick and Chanes were running again, heedless of the confusion and terror surrounding them. By now four more radium bombs had scored hits somewhere on the Base. Most of the combat ships, however, were off the ground by now. Not many more bombs would land before the huge space battleships of the invaders would be driven off.

At last the two young officers were before the quarters of old Iron Walters. Dick was up the steps in a bound, through the door, with Chanes at his heels. The room they entered was half-filled with wives and children of other officers. In charge were the other three replacement officers who had arrived that day. Wildly Dick's eyes searched the room for a sign of Bea Walters.

THEN he saw her. She was in the far corner of the spacious room, her back turned to him. Several of the officers' wives were grouped around her, and Dick saw that she was crying, for her slim shoulders shook with sobs and her lovely blond head was bent.

He was across the room in an instant and at her side.

"Bea," he found his voice sounding strange in his ears, husky. "Bea, darling. What's wrong?"

A short plump woman, one of the officers' wives, turned to him soberly.

"Her father," she said. "Commander Walters was killed by one of the first bombs."

Dick's features hardened as he mentally cursed the terror of the invaders, then softened as he looked at Bea.

"Brace up, honey," he half whispered. "The old fellow was a soldier. No tears. He wouldn't have wanted to go any other way than in battle."

Bea Walters' sobbing quieted, and she wiped away the tears from her large brown eyes.

"Sorry, Dick. I didn't think of it that way. I suppose you're right. I shouldn't carry on like this."

Dick gripped her arm warmly. "That's the way," he encouraged.

Then he looked about the large room. There were others, from the sound of things, who had lost much in the fury of the invaders' attack.

"Maybe we can be of some use to the rest," he added.

And at that moment Dick realized that the sound of steady bomb explosions had ceased as abruptly as the raid had begun. But for the faint, far-off whine of the ships in space above them, all was now deathly quiet.

Chanes had followed on Dick's heels.

"The invaders," he said. "They've been driven off."

A uniformed dispatch carrier worked his way through the throng. His eyes searched the group, looking for an officer. He spied Dick and was beside him in a moment.

"A message," he blurted. "The strata-telegrapher picked it up on his space band three minutes ago. He said to relay it to an officer immediately, sir."

Dick nodded automatically, taking the message. The dispatch carrier saluted and was gone. While Bea and Chanes crowded close, Dick unfolded the communication. Simultaneously, an exclamation of startled horror broke from their lips. For the message read:

NEW YORK HAS FALLEN BENEATH A CONCERTED MONGOL DRIVE. KAMA KHAN'S HORDES SWEEPING WESTWARD ACROSS U. S., MEETING SLIGHT RESISTANCE. BATTLE WAGING FURIOUSLY ALONG ROCKY MOUNTAIN FRONT. PREPARE TO ABANDON SPACE BASE 10, OBJECT OF INVADERS' NEXT DRIVE.—GENERAL S. K. BLAINE, COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF U. S. ARMY FORCES ON EARTH.

"Good God," Dick muttered. "It looks like the end of things, if Blaine and his forces can't stop the Mongols at the Rockies."

"New York must have been attacked less than a week after we left War College to come up here," Chanes muttered incredulously.

Bea was white, lips tensed, saying nothing. Her lovely face portrayed mixed emotions of fear and rage. She was trembling slightly, from the shock of the past minutes.

"Abandon Space Base 10," Dick said bitterly. "For what? If Khan's forces sweep the United States, the last territory on Earth to hold out against the Mongols, where can we go? Space Base 10 is the only refuge we have here in the cosmos. Khan and his Mongol hordes have already conquered the other planets."

His jaw tightened, and he faced Bea and Chanes.

"Don't let word of this get out," he commanded. "It can't do any good, and might do irreparable harm. I'll give the message to Craig as soon as the combat squadron comes back."

CHAPTER III

New Orders

FLIGHT COMMANDER CRAIG STARKE sat at his desk, one hand wrapped around a pony of brandy, the other absent-mindedly loosening the collar of his military tunic. A cigarette hung almost forgotten from the corner of his handsome, somewhat cynical mouth. Starke was trying, as he had

tried many times during the past ten years, to forget the memory of another afternoon's combat in space.

"Six more gone," he thought bitterly. "All of them pals. Burned to cinders in space. One of them might have been my brother."

And then, to drown the rage and futility that swelled in his throat, he gulped the remainder of his brandy in a swift gesture.

A moment later, Lieutenant Dick Starke stepped into the room.

"Well," Flight Commander Starke spat angrily. "You might knock, Lieutenant."

He glared at his brother, watching the youngster's eyes flick quickly, accusingly, to the glass he held in his hand.

"A message," Dick said quickly, "came in over the stratagraph less than fifteen minutes ago."

He held out a paper in his hand. And while his brother unfolded the white sheet, Dick added,

"I also wanted to tell you that one of the invaders' bombs got Commander Walters. He's dead."

Starke looked up sharply, for an instant fighting against emotion. Then he was calm, apparently.

"I—I'm sorry." He ran a hand across his brow. "He was a great soldier, a gallant commander." Then his voice hardened. "But that's war, Lieutenant, the 'glamorous', 'glorious' adventure you've found for yourself." Then he turned his attention to the message.

As his brother read the message from General Blaine, Dick saw his face pale beneath its tan. Then the muscles of the lean jaw went tight, into hard small knots. At length he looked up.

"You've read this?" he asked.

Dick merely nodded. Starke went on, "With Walters dead, that means that I'm shouldered with command of the entire Base. There was one thing Blaine didn't know when he sent this message—the Mongol invaders have already drawn a steel ring around Space Base 10. We found that out this afternoon, when we went up to drive their bombers away from the strata-lines. We've no chance of breaking through them. Not now—inasmuch as we're unable to get help from Earth any longer."

"But, New York—I never thought they'd take New York," Dick blurted.

"No. None of us imagined they would. But they have. And now we're ringed in up here. It looks like the end."

There was an awkward silence. "Isn't there a chance of breaking through?" Dick flushed at his brother's hard stare. "I mean, can't some of us—volunteers, for example—take a crack at breaking through the ring around Base 10?"

"Your ideas," Craig Starke observed acidly, "are as foolish as they are melodramatic, Lieutenant. Tactical plans lie in my authority, not the authority of a junior officer. Please remember that. Good day, Lieutenant!"

Crimson, Dick wheeled and stamped out of the room. There was a strange light in his brother's eyes as he watched him leave, a light that betrayed something of grudging admiration.

AN orderly entered a moment later. "This letter, sir," he said, "was addressed to you by Commander Walters. He ordered it delivered to you—in case anything happened to him."

He saluted and closed the door. Starke opened the letter.

Dear Starke:

If you receive this message, it will be because I am no longer with you. As my second in command, you will have taken over responsibility for the Base. There were

certain letters from the War Department, which you will find in my wall safe, that you never knew about. They concern emergency orders issued to me less than six months ago—vital information that I was not permitted to pass on even to you. If it becomes necessary to rely on these emergency instructions, for God's sake do so.

It was signed simply "Walters."

Starke rose, buttoning the throat of his tunic. He'd have to get those instructions.

Bea Walters met him at the door of the late commander's quarters. She was dressed in a dark dress that accentuated the lovely blondness of her hair, the delicate lines of her oval features. Her eyes showed she had been crying.

"Come in, Craig."

For a moment he stood awkwardly in the hallway, twisting his uniform cap in his hands, wishing that he could properly phrase the words that he felt inside him. The best he could do was,

"Sorry, Bea. Sorry as the devil. We all are. You know that."

"Yes, Craig," she said simply. "I—I understand."

Then he told her of her father's message, of the papers he was supposed to take from the safe. She nodded in acquiescence and he followed her through the living room.

In the study where her father had kept most of his effects, Bea closed the door and walked to a picture on the wall. She pushed this back, revealing a safe. After a moment she had opened it.

"Take whatever is necessary, Craig," she said.

He found the envelopes, big and bulky, with the official stamp of the War Department on them.

"These are all I'll be needing, Bea."

She closed the safe then, and the two of them walked in silence back to the living room.

"Wait, Craig." Bea spoke the words softly, yet quickly. He turned to face her.

"I wanted to talk to you," Bea went on, "about Dick." Her eyes indicated that she was aware of the sudden mask that slipped over his features. "Please, Craig," she said. "You must listen to me."

"Well?" Starke spoke brusquely, huskily.

"I asked him to quit his medical studies, Craig. I had father get him assigned to this Base."

"I'd figured as much," Starke told her.

"I'm sorry now, Craig," Bea said softly. "I never knew what I was getting him into until today."

STARKE said sharply, "It doesn't really matter any longer. Good day."

Then he was trotting briskly down the steps of the house, and out onto the hangar field. Darkness was closing in on Base 10 by the time he reached his office once more. Entering, he snapped on the light, slid the catch to the door, and walked over to his desk.

Methodically, he slit open the envelopes he'd taken from the wall safe, arranging them on his desk. He moved across to his cabinet, returned with a decanter of brandy, cigarettes and a small glass. Then he loosened the collar on his tunic and got down to intensive study. These were Craig Starke's emergency instructions. And the emergency was now at hand.

CHAPTER IV

Suicide Squadron

FIVE hours later, Starke was still in his office. The papers from the War Department had long since been digested, and were now reposing once

more in the breast pocket of his tunic. The decanter of brandy was half empty, and the cigarette tray on his desk was heaped with stubs.

He pondered Commander Walters' instructions about the shipment that had come from Earth six weeks before—a War Department consignment, the labels on the boxes had said.

They were still in the old arsenal, those crates, guarded day and night—though Walters had been the only man who knew what they contained. And now it was Starke's job to bring those crates forth and order their contents assembled. For those crates contained space ships.

Moving in sudden decision, Starke strode over to his desk, snapped on the televisor box. In a moment the face of the communications orderly focused on the screen.

"Yes, sir?" said the orderly, hastily turning his head to face his superior, stuffing a news bulletin out of sight.

"Tell all flight officers, junior and senior, to report here in my office immediately," Starke directed.

Half an hour later, facing the assembled flight officers of Base 10, Craig Starke said:

"I called you men to my office to inform you officially that I have taken over the command vacated by the death of Commander Walters."

Someone coughed nervously in the silence that followed.

"Also," Starke continued, fingers restlessly toying with the letter opener on his desk, "I have several important matters to discuss with you gentlemen. The first being," he reached into his drawer to produce the message his brother had given him earlier in the day, "a stratagraph message from General Blaine, ordering the immediate evacuation of Space Base 10."

Starke paused to light a cigarette. "You men who went up with me this afternoon, to drive off the bombing attack of our enemy, are all aware that Base 10 has been thoroughly surrounded by enemy squadrons." There was a murmur among the officers.

"I sent scout patrols out into space immediately after we drove off the bombers. These patrols returned with information concerning the strength and position of the enemy."

Starke nodded at a stocky, red-haired little officer.

"Captain Shay, here, has the report of the scouting patrol. Please read it, Captain."

Shay cleared his throat self-consciously, unfolding a chart which he'd been holding in his hand.

"Base 10, as far as can be ascertained," he began, "is completely surrounded by four enemy space squadrons. These squadrons comprise four flotillas totaling eight space battleships, which are patrolling our first Base defense line. In addition, the enemy has a roving squadron of ten cruiser-type space boats, three space ship carriers, and an aggregate of twenty of the smaller combat type space ships.

"This is a total unit strength of forty-one ships capable of independent battle action. The range patrolled by the enemy is the equivalent of our entire border area."

THERE was a moment of suspended silence.

"That," Craig Starke remarked dryly, "is the situation which we face, gentlemen. Briefly, it amounts to this: With our fighting strength at present status, the odds of our combat ships breaking through the ring are roughly —five hundred to one."

He stared for a moment at the tensed faces of his men. Then he went on.

"We have enough supplies on Base 10

to last us for several months. As it stands, the invaders haven't enough strength to take the Base from us. We can hold them off until our supplies run out. But after that—" He broke off, spreading his hands in an expressive gesture.

Looking speculatively across the faces of his officers, Starke debated swiftly the best manner of approaching the reason for this meeting. He caught his brother, in the rear of the group, whispering excitedly to the rosy-cheeked Chanes, who stood beside him. That gave Starke his cue. He said,

"One of our recently arrived replacement officers made a suggestion this afternoon—a suggestion that carried more weight than he imagined. He made mention of a volunteer squadron. That, gentlemen, is precisely what we shall have to count on to break the ring that encircles us."

"But at five hundred to one!" Captain Shay had stepped forward again. "It's madness to think of such a venture, Commander!"

Starke smiled, but without humor. "Five hundred to one, yes. But those are odds based on our present combat fighting equipment. I am speaking of equipment which you men know nothing about. Equipment which arrived at the Base here secretly less than six weeks ago, and which is now stored in the old arsenal."

There was a gasp of surprise from the officers assembled. Starke held up his hand for silence.

"Yes, that's correct. The War Department, expecting some such emergency, sent a special shipment of five hundred large crates—supposedly extra parts for our present space ships—which contain forty unassembled 'mystery' space ships. They are a type that have never been used in this war before. In the Government's files they are referred to as 'suicide ships.' They are single-seater space fighters."

The first gasp of astonishment was nothing compared to the comment aroused by Commander Starke's last sentence. Chanes spoke the amazement of all when he repeated incredulously,

"*Single*-seaters?"

Starke nodded briskly. "That's right. Forty-five of them, to repeat myself. All of them are equipped for one single purpose—to wreak havoc among enemy squadrons. And—*they weren't constructed to return after their work was completed!*"

An officer, at least twenty years Starke's senior in service, stepped forward. His rugged features were perplexed.

"Commander Starke, might I remind you that you haven't given any reason, as yet, for such an attempt? What is to prevent us from asking aid from Earth? Surely, the most sensible strategy would be to wait for help!"

STARKE answered him calmly enough.

"You're quite within your rights in asking that question, Major Casey. But here is your answer. I was forced to hold this information back until now. New York has fallen before the forces of Kama Khan, and our armies have been driven back to the Rocky Mountain front!"

Above the excited bedlam of voices, Starke pounded his fist on the desk. For fully four minutes, however, the turmoil went on unabated. At length the room quieted, and he could be heard again.

"There, gentlemen, is the situation we must face. I needn't add that I'm counting on each one of you to stand by. If we play our hand closely, there's a chance that the majority of us will

come out with whole skins. Report at the hangars directly after assembly tomorrow morning. I'll have had the mechanics working on the new ships by then, and all of you will have to become thoroughly acquainted with them. That's all. Dismissed!"

As he watched the last of his subalterns file out of his office and into the darkness of the parade ground, Craig Starke felt suddenly, sickeningly weary. The responsibility of leadership, carried for ten years of ceaseless effort at the front, had been doubled within the past twenty-four hours. And he felt this responsibility pressing down upon him mercilessly, relentlessly.

"I hope," he muttered with eyes half shut, "that I won't let old Walters down. I can't let any of them down. Whatever happens from now on is directly up to me!"

He walked dejectedly back to his desk, slumping down in his worn leather chair. Then he picked up a pen, scratched rapidly for a few moments, signed his name, and leaned back. In the morning, assembling of the suicide ships would get under way.

CHAPTER V

The Roll Call

EXCITEMENT ran high on Base 10 the next morning. The news of their plight was received by both Army and civilian residents of the Base with an attitude of quiet determination. Walking from Officers' Mess, Chanes commented on this to Dick Starke.

"Their chins are still up, thank God," Chanes said. "That's half the battle."

"If it weren't for the circumstances, you'd think that a holiday spirit had taken hold of the Base, eh?" Dick answered.

Chanes nodded. "They're all hanging around the arsenal, evidently waiting for the first of the new ships to be carted out."

"Single-seaters," Dick observed, half to himself. "I still don't get it. What chance in hell will such ships have against the enormous battlecraft of Kama Khan?"

"That," Chanes replied, "is what we have to find out. Let's get over there." The pair turned their steps toward the hangars.

Mechanics were assembling the new fighters before an interested audience of officers, privates and civilians when they arrived on the field. The first of the new ships was almost assembled, and Dick and Chanes had to elbow their way through the crowd before they could study the craft.

"Well, I'll be damned," Chanes gasped. "Look at that baby!"

Dick's jaw, too, had dropped open in surprise. The single-seater rocket fighter was incredibly small, approximately twelve feet in length, shaped almost like a space torpedo. The pilot's cockpit was just barely large enough to permit movement. Mounted at the nose of the craft were twin atomic mortar guns. On the sleek, steel stomach of the space fighter, there were releases for as many as six space bomb discharges.

The nose of the single-seater was what held Dick Starke's attention. It had been constructed to hold something inside its metal turret, but whatever that something was, it hadn't been installed as yet. Dick commented on this to Chanes.

"What do you suppose is going into the nose?"

Chanes looked at him sharply. "Didn't you know?" Then, smiling w r y l y, "Nitroglycerin compression fluid!"

"Huh!" Dick was jolted. "The

damned thing not only carries every conceivable type of space weapon—it's a veritable bomb in itself!"

"Exactly."

They fell silent then, watching mechanics rapidly assemble the bomb carriages on the stomach of the tiny space fighter.

"It's funny," Chanes said softly. "Here we are, standing around watching the construction of our own coffins."

"Not necessarily," Dick said. "We don't know who's going to be assigned to them."

"Why," Chanes spread his hands, "it will be a question of volunteers, of course. What else?"

There was a strange sensation in the pit of Dick Starke's stomach. His hands felt moist, his throat dry. He wasn't afraid of death. And he knew, beyond all certainty, that he would be one of the first to volunteer. He knew, in other words, that his remaining hours of life were numbered. And, being young, he didn't want to die.

HE looked instinctively at Chanes. From the expression in the other's eyes, Dick saw that Chanes, too, was thinking along much the same lines. Dick grinned. Chanes smiled and squeezed his roommate's arm in mutual sympathy.

They turned then, these two young officers, and sauntered away from the hangars. Both of them were silent, each with his own thoughts. They didn't hear the first shout.

"Dick!" It was a girl's voice. "Dick!" They turned, to see Bea Walters running up behind them. She was still dressed in her somber black costume, but she was smiling now, and the blond loveliness of her hair crowned the perfection of her features.

"I heard," she said, "that there's going to be an attempt made to break through Kama Khan's squadron blockade."

The two young officers nodded mutely.

"This might be the turning point in the war," Bea went on. "Oh, I do hope that this new plan is successful. I understand that the invaders have the most important sections of their space squadrons waiting in the first strata. I—" She broke off abruptly at the expression in Dick's eyes, the expression he couldn't hide. "Why, Dick, what's wrong?"

"Nothing, honey," Dick said quickly, slipping an arm about her waist. Then he saw the look on Chanes' face. It said, plainly, "Better tell her, fella. She'll know sooner or later."

Dick bit his underlip. "I have to talk to you alone, Bea. There's something you ought to know." Then, to Chanes: "Do you mind?"

"Not a bit," his companion nodded. "I'll run on along; some things to attend to, anyway."

Wordlessly, Dick led Bea over to the deserted side of an old hangar.

"Dick," Bea said anxiously. "What is it? What's wrong? What's happened?"

"I might as well tell you, honey. It's about the flight, the attack that's planned to break the invaders' blockade around Base 10."

Pain came suddenly into the girl's eyes. "I know, Dick," she said. "It's going to be terribly dangerous. Space war always is. I ought to know. After all, father—"

She stopped, then went on quickly. "I know, at any rate, that the situation is more than most of us realize. I was only trying to be cheerful for your sake —to make you think that I was able to keep my chin up."

Suddenly hot little tears were running down the girl's cheeks. "Oh, Dick,

Dick, I can't bear it any longer! It's all my fault. I brought you up here, through father, and now—" She buried her face against his chest.

Dick fought for control of himself, iron control that would enable him to tell her the truth. In a strained, husky voice, he heard himself saying,

"It isn't just war, this time. It's more than that, honey. I've got to tell you. You've got to know."

Bea had raised her head, and was looking at him from tear-stained eyes. Dick hated himself for what he must say next.

"This is going to be a suicide attack, darling. No one has been chosen. Volunteers will be called for. Naturally, I'll have to be one of those volunteers. None of us is expected to return."

He continued grimly, explaining in detail the nature of the new fighter craft that was to be used in the attack. Suddenly he stopped, his voice catching in his throat.

BEA had gone limp in his arms, fainted . . . Dick carried her home, grim-faced.

Back in his quarters, he walked slowly into his room, found Chanes already there, characteristically stretched out on his cot, smoking a cigarette.

Dick didn't speak, and Chanes merely said, "You told her?"

Dick nodded, slumping down on his bunk, head in hands.

Chanes' voice came to him. "What the hell, Dick. I understand. . . ." There was embarrassment, tempered with unspoken comradeship. Then Chanes was going on, haltingly.

"I had a girl like Bea, once. She was —she died—four years ago, when the Mongols took Berlin." His voice suddenly hardened. "So it's easier for me. There's no one left to give a damn."

Dick jumped up and grabbed his roommate by the shoulder. He shook Chanes until the other's teeth chattered.

"Don't say that!" he rasped between set teeth. "Don't ever say that again. You've been like a brother to me, and you know it."

And then Dick Starke blushed like a schoolboy, and Chanes punched him softly in the jaw.

* * *

THEY met that evening in the old arsenal. Sixty flight officers and some twenty mechanics, and no one was smiling. Flight Commander Craig Starke, looking more worn and haggard then before, faced them silently for several moments.

"Gentlemen," Starke began, his voice husky, "we are all aware of the reason for this assembly. All of you have had an opportunity to acquaint yourselves with the nature of our new combat ships this afternoon. Last night, I informed you as to the nature of the attack that we had planned. I told you frankly that the officers who man these space fighters are not expected to return."

Standing beside Dick, somewhere in the rear of the assembly, Chanes nudged him sharply.

"Here's the pitch," he whispered.

"There are forty-five of these ships," Starke went on. "We shall need the same number of men for our patrol." He looked meaningly at the ranks of men before him. "I've checked the roster of our squadrons, eliminating ten of the senior officers. They will not be permitted to sacrifice themselves, for obvious reasons stated in War Department instructions." He paused. "That leaves fifty men from whom I must draw my volunteers."

The silence was intense.

"I want all of you to understand that no one is obliged to offer himself for duty in this attack. . . . That's about all, gentlemen. Now I must ask for all

who would volunteer to step forward."

The ranks of flight officers moved forward to a man.

Craig Starke smiled, rubbing his hand across his eyes.

"I expected as much," he said quietly. "But I can't use you all. We'll need men to remain at the Base. I'll check our roster, select those of you I need."

His eyes picked out his younger brother's face from the ranks.

"Dismissed, men," he said. But he was still looking at his kid brother.

CHAPTER VI

Off to Battle

SHORTLY before midnight an orderly knocked on the door of the room occupied by Dick Starke and Chanes. Dick, who had been sitting sleeplessly on the edge of his bunk, crossed the room in a stride and threw the door open.

"Lieutenants Starke and Chanes?" the orderly inquired.

"That's right." Dick's heart was pounding.

"Commander's compliments, sir," the orderly went on, handing two envelopes to Dick. "Instructions for the morning, sir."

Chanes hadn't been asleep, and now was up beside Dick, reaching for the envelope addressed to him.

"This is it!" he said excitedly.

Then they were reading the instructions entailed in each message. The orderly's heels could be heard clicking off down the hall.

"At six a.m.," Dick was reading aloud, "report at the hangar line for attack duty. Additional instructions will be issued there."

"Mine," said Chanes, "reads exactly the same. Well, fella, it looks as though we've been elected. . . ."

Before the sun rose on the following morning, Chanes was out of his bunk, quietly slipping on his clothes. When he had finished dressing he tiptoed cautiously across to where Dick lay sleeping, listened for a moment beside him. Then, satisfied that the other still slept, he crossed to the door. He opened it cautiously, listening again for a moment. Carefully he shut the door and moved off down the corridor.

Once outside Officers' Hall, Chanes turned toward the Strata Communications Building, some three hundred yards across the parade ground. Still moving carefully, he made his way across the field, climbed the steps to the Communications Building.

At the top of the steps he stood for a moment beside the door. Then he rapped softly, three short knocks followed by one heavy rap. After what seemed an eternity, the door opened and Chanes faced a rotund little man dressed in the uniform of a dispatch officer.

Chanes stepped into the lighted room, and the rotund little dispatch officer closed the door quickly behind him. The fat little fellow turned angrily.

"Are you a fool," he snarled, "coming here at this hour?"

"Take it easy," Chanes hissed. "I just wanted to check with you. The attack is planned, as you know by now, for sometime after six this morning. That gives you two hours in which to warn the ships lying outside the strata line of defense. They can spread the word to the others."

"Yes, yes," the little man snapped. "I'll take care of those details. You handle your end of it, and I'll carry out mine."

"Don't worry about me," Chanes scoffed. "When I get finished with the regular combat ships, there won't be one

of them that can reach the strata line."

The other's eyes widened. "The regular combat ships are to convoy the new suicide rockets to the strata line?"

Chanes smiled. "That's the idea. Then the combat ships are to aid the suicide squadron in the attack. You did your work well. The High Command will be pleased, if you don't muff the last of it. These fools here are certain that New York has been taken. That phony message from General Blaine did exactly what Intelligence expected it to do. Now they've revealed their suicide fleet, and it can be destroyed with the utmost simplicity. Then, possibly, our commandant, the Great Khan, will actually take New York—once he has Base 10 under control."

THE rotund little dispatch officer smiled hastily.

"Fine. Excellent. I'll warn the Red Fleet, then, as soon as you leave."

Chanes was at the door. "Good enough. And I'll handle those combat convoys. Don't forget, tell the Red Fleet commanders that each of the new craft is equipped with high explosive in the nose. Careful marksmanship, with guns trained on that explosive, will eliminate the suicide fleet before they can do any damage."

Then Chanes was outside once more, slipping softly along in the shadows, moving toward the hangar line . . .

Sharply, the bugler's blasts woke the garrison of Base 10, two hours later. Lights flickered on in Officers' Hall, and men began to pour across the field. Mechanics threw open hangar doors, rolling out the space fighter ships. Moments passed. Mingled voices, hushed with excitement, rose and fell as men moved about.

Then the sudden ear-splitting din of the rockets, splatting to a crescendo, as mechanics warmed the ships. Orange spurts, a long line of them, flashed through the half darkness of the morning.

Flight Commander Craig Starke stood in the center of the parade ground, before him a row of flight officers.

He was peering upward, studying the sky, which was a quilting of clouds scattered across gray splotches that would turn into blue with the coming of the sun. The cloud strata behind those splotches was thick, yet ragged enough to give Starke some idea of the conditions in the world behind the gray cotton—a world wherein the invaders' flotilla lay in wait, like a tiger about to pounce.

Dick Starke, standing beside Chanes, shivered slightly in the cold of the morning, shivered too from the excitement that held the field in an electric static.

An officer was moving along the line in which they stood, handing out paper disks, upon which numbers were stamped. He gave the disks to Dick and Chanes.

"What are these for?" Dick muttered to his companion.

"The number on the disk designates the single-seater to which you're assigned," Chanes replied, his eyes following the progress of the rotund little dispatch officer who moved along handing out more disks.

The banging of the rockets had been subdued. Subdued enough for Craig Starke's voice to carry to the men who stood before him.

"Gentlemen, you will be escorted by regular combat ships. There have been only thirty-five of you assigned to the suicide fleet. In the nose of each suicide ship is enough explosive to blow a full-sized space dreadnought to smithereens. This explosive is the last measure which you will be called upon to employ.

"The use is obvious. But don't for-

get, dive for the enemy only after all your other ammunition has been exhausted. There are radio control panels in each of the new single-seaters. Through means of this, I shall keep in touch with the suicide fleet. Good luck, gentlemen!"

Then Dick was gripping Chanes' hand, hard. His voice was husky.

"Good luck, fellow."

Chanes looked at him for a moment, wordlessly. A look as of pain crossed his face. His voice, when he replied, was unsteady.

"So long, youngster. Tough it had to turn out like this . . ."

DICK had been assigned single-seater 8. Chanes was slated for number 7. They walked together silently for perhaps thirty yards before arriving at their crafts.

Looking down the line, Dick saw that his brother was climbing into one of the combat space fighters, with two other officers and a gunner. Something came into his throat then.

He, Dick Starke, was going to die. He was a soldier, and death was a soldier's lot. But Craig—Craig hadn't even spoken to him—

"Dick!"

The young officer wheeled, to face Bea Walters. She was standing misty-eyed before him, but her chin was firm, her head upraised.

"Bea!" The name came brokenly from him, and he stepped forward, folding the girl in his arms. "Bea," darling," he murmured. "I wish you hadn't come. It makes it harder for me to leave you."

"I'm not here to stop you, Dick," Bea said, her voice quivering. "It's just to say"—her voice broke—"good-by!"

"Good-by, darling." Somehow Dick had managed to say it. And then he was pushing her from him, climbing into the tiny single-seater space ship. It was easier that way, quicker.

A mechanic was rolling the glass turret across the cockpit, a turret that permitted almost complete visibility on all sides. But the gauges in front of Dick Starke were a blur, and he wiped a hand fiercely across his eyes.

Then, from the radiophone panel, he heard the voice of his brother, issuing the first command.

"Combat ships are to go up first. They will wait for the regular combat squadron to follow, just inside the strata line."

The noise that had been deafening a moment before increased to incredible proportions now as the full blast of the combat rockets was turned on. A series of swishing, silver streaks, disappearing beyond the gray of the sky, marked the take-off of the first space fighters.

Then Dick was gunning the rockets of his own tiny ship, ears ringing to the clamor of the other suicide fighters on the line as they too prepared to scream upward.

In the moments before he released full throttle force, Dick inspected the bomb releases, and the forward gun mechanisms. All was in order. Then his hand sought the throttle, pulled back. A moment later, and the tiny ship was hurtling upward into space.

CHAPTER VII

In Crucial Combat

DICK STARKE was through the first overlayer, making for the strata line, when he took his first look about him. On all sides, flying combat formation, were the other single-seaters. Dick wondered vaguely where Chanes had taken position. Then, for a sickening instant, he remembered the nitroglycerin that was stored in the nose of the

craft. He would never land again.

Last flight! The words beat over and over again in his brain until at last, by sheer power of will, he drove them out. He felt better then. He was a space fighter out on patrol. Nothing more. Forget the rest. Didn't help to think of it, anyway. . . .

Minutes later the mystery ship attackers sighted their combat convoy. Ten ships, motors idling, rockets silent, waited their arrival. Dick managed to pick out the ship in which his brother was riding. Craig Starke hadn't said "so long," hadn't made the slightest gesture in his direction. To hell with it, Dick thought bitterly. I'm a space fighter, that's all. A human bomb.

The combat ships, on sighting the single-seaters, came to life, rocket splashes spitting orange from their tails, and moved up to meet the convoyed suicide squadron.

Dick cut the throttle, and the light in his radiophone panel glowed. Then Craig Starke's voice came in.

"Follow closely on the tails of your convoy. According to estimates, we encounter the enemy inside of fifteen minutes." Then: "To Lieutenant Dick Starke. Good luck, kid!"

A lump came swiftly to Dick's throat. That had been Craig! Craig! He'd not forgotten him. Dick swallowed hard, grinned a funny half grin. Hell—it wasn't so bad, now. Not nearly so bad!

Five minutes later the panel light glowed a g a i n. Flight Commander Starke's voice came in this time with calmness, steel written in every inflection.

"Single-seater 7," he said. "Single-seater 7. You have been under observation ever since arrival at Base 10. You were closely watched several hours ago."

Dick frowned in perplexity. "What the devil— Why, that's Chanes' number!"

His brother's voice went on harshly. "The messages sent to the enemy were permitted to go through, Lieutenant Chanes, because we wanted it that way. The ships you tampered with this morning were repaired before flight—even the ship in which you now are, the single-seater from which you removed the explosives—hoping to save your own hide.

"The nose of your ship is loaded, Chanes, loaded with explosives. Your scheme boomeranged a hundred percent, Chanes. Now you've got to pay the penalty."

Dick was thunderstruck. Explosives? Chanes had removed the nitro from his own ship? Impossible! Absolutely insane. . . .

"Yes, Chanes," Dick heard his brother's relentless voice. "You didn't get away with it. We're safely in space now, Chanes. You can't reach the enemy. And you're cooked. Through. Washed up!"

There was a static interruption, then Starke's voice flooded through, clearly.

"To all men in the suicide squadron! It is only now that I am able to announce that *there is no explosive in the nose of any single-seater!* It was a necessary ruse, gentlemen, to thwart spies within our ranks. You are not a suicide group, men. You're a fighting unit—and I'll expect some hell-for-leather combat from the bunch of you! Stay clear of ship 7, piloted by Chanes. His ship carries high explosives!"

Dick's head was swimming with a thousand unanswered questions. Chanes a *spy?* Had this all been a trick to delude the enemy into acting on false information? The realization came with considerable of a shock, the more so because he had grown fond of his erstwhile roommate.

THEN, swiftly, Dick saw a silver streak shoot out in front of their formation, throttle wide open, fast disappearing. It was Chanes! Chanes, heading for his Mongol comrades, trying to arrive before the Earth fleet engaged the hordes of Kama Khan. Craig Starke barked through the radiophone,

"There's our spy! After him! He'll take us straight to the enemy!"

Dick gunned forward full throttle. But the formation, bound by military flight lines, couldn't hope to catch Chanes. Ten minutes passed without a sight of him. Then they saw his ship—and the huge space dreadnoughts of the Red Fleet. They had contacted the enemy!

A thrill raced down Dick's spine as he saw his brother's combat space ship kick over in a wheeling arc, signal for the attack.

Chanes had been trying to signal, warn the Mongol fleet; but Dick, as he drew closer, saw instantly what had happened. The invaders, mistaking him for an enemy, had driven him off with a vicious burst of fire!

For a split second Dick felt a surge of pity for the young spy. Then his brother's voice, barking combat commands, came through.

"Single-seaters bear down on the largest of the space battleships! Combat craft, engage the dreadnought group. All space craft, stay clear of Chanes. He's still dangerous, with that explosive. If you get the chance, fire on him from long range—and aim for the nose of his fighter! He's the only 'suicide fighter' in this man's outfit!"

Dick barely heard the last. Dick didn't hear anything for the next few minutes, because he suddenly found himself in a fight that he'd never forget if he lived to be a hundred.

For as he dived, in formation with three single-seaters, the huge sides of the Mongol space battleships came whipping up at him through the gunsights of his forward detonon mortar. He pulled the trips savagely, releasing shell after shell at the red side of the nearest enemy craft.

He could see men running pellmell along the decks of the vessel in crazy panic. The guns of the huge dreadnought swiveled helplessly, trying to line on the Earth ship. Then he was past the craft with a final burst of shellfire.

Wheeling in a fast arc, Dick was about to return to attack when the last shell his detonon gun had projected burrowed into the dreadnought's vitals. There was a mushroom of white flame followed by a terrific explosion. Dick held on for dear life as his little pursuit fighter was tossed about like a cork in a gale.

When he had regained control, he peered out through the glass turret over the cockpit. He ducked his head instinctively, as a rain of fragments showered down. Score Number 1 for the Earth fleet!

Then Dick found himself in the midst of a milling, spitting vortex in which Earth pilot and Mongol killer fought viciously for supremacy. He felt his ship shake, jerked his head around and found a Mongol fighter hard on his tail.

Shouting his defiance, Dick made his century's version of an Immelmann turn and was blasting away at his opponent's rear in a matter of seconds. There was a sudden *puff!* and the Mongol simply disintegrated.

DICK pulled up and took a hurried inventory. All over the sky Mongol dreadnoughts were being engaged by the speedy little hornets which Craig Starke had unleashed upon them. The protective guard of Mongol pursuit

ships circled helplessly about, unable to compete in such swift maneuvering. Every few seconds there was another explosion as a Mongol battlecraft blew up.

Suddenly Dick found himself on the outskirts of the battle, about to circle back into the fray. He scanned the skies for any lurking Mongol fighter—and caught a lone scout streaking heavenward in an Earth ship.

Chanes! Teeth grimly locked, Dick screamed in pursuit. In three minutes he was within range. But Chanes' ship was just as fast. Like two angry wasps, Mongol and Earthman buzzed about each other.

Dick never knew whether he or Chanes was the better pilot. He only knew that his ex-roommate was loaded up with nitroglycerin and was in much the more dangerous position. He only knew that suddenly he was streaking broadside at Chanes, and that all at once the spy's frantic face loomed behind the closed-in glass turret.

Chanes made frantic gestures, and abruptly Dick understood. If he fired at the spy, the resulting detonation from the nitroglycerin would blow both to kingdom come. He could afford only to shoot at the ship from long range.

And that, Dick couldn't force himself to do. "I'm a space pilot, not a butcher," he told himself fiercely. "That—that smells too much of boxing a rat in a trap."

Further strain on his conscience was relieved when Chanes suddenly unholstered a revolver-like ray gun he'd evidently concealed on his person. Chanes gestured then, motioned for Dick to make tracks. And Dick understood.

The spy was going to shoot through the fuselage of his ship, toward the nose. He, Chanes, had failed in his mission. He was disgraced. For an Oriental, there was no other way out.

Tears came to Dick's eyes, angry tears. So Chanes was giving him a chance to escape—because the resulting concussion at such short range would mean double annihilation. Chanes—spy, Mongol, deadly enemy to his race—was a man after all!

Dick edged closer to the spy. "Go back!" he shouted over the interspace radiophone whose mouthpiece was set in place in his helmet. "I'll take you prisoner! Land!"

And through his headphones came back, "Sorry, fella. But they shoot spies, you know. And even your influence couldn't get me off. It's better this way, Dick. After all, I'm a disgraced man. I failed in my mission. Turn off your headphones, son. . . ."

There was a whistling streak through the sky, and Chanes screamed away in a widening arc. For a moment Dick sat rigid, holding his breath. Then quickly he switched off his headphones, in the nick of time. With a tremendous detonation Chanes blew himself into oblivion. The explosion was so great that even at this distance, thousands of feet away, Dick's pursuit craft tossed about madly. If he had left the headphones on, that last blast through Chanes' radiophone would have torn his eardrums right out of his head.

Shaking the tears from his eyes, Dick barged back into the battle. But there was no more battle. Every single Mongol dreadnought had been blown asunder. Off toward the horizon were flashing streaks, remnants of the Mongols' pursuit ship convoy, streaking for home for their very lives.

An hour later, the victorious youngsters of Space Base 10 gathered in the office of Flight Commander Craig Starke. Each instinctively counted noses. Ten men were missing. Others among them showed the grueling strain of the battle, in bruised heads knocked

against cockpit coamings, stiff limbs, eyes still narrow with the horror that had raged.

"Gentlemen!" Craig Starke rose from his chair. "Gentlemen, my congratulations. You have done well today—very well indeed. As a result of your successful flight, the Mongol hordes have been dangerously weakened. They have lost some of their most powerful space battlecraft. Gentlemen, I believe this flight today marks the turning point in the war."

The pilots of Space Base 10 looked at one another, and there were fervent murmurs of approval.

A GIRL stood up then, as Starke beckoned to her. A girl with glorious blond hair, who had been sitting next to the commander's desk. A girl whom everyone knew as Bea Walters, daughter of their late senior officer.

"Gentlemen," Starke said vibrantly, "we have this young lady to thank for the lives of all of us. It was she who discovered that Chanes was a Mongol spy."

"How?" came the chorus from a score of husky, amazed voices.

Starke smiled at their eagerness. "Miss Walters is—ah—a woman," he said. "And being a true member of her sex, she was struck intuitively with the fact that when the invaders bombed us in that vicious raid, Chanes seemed to be less shocked, less indignant than any of us.

"The more she thought about it, the stranger it loomed in her mind. So one evening at mess, when all the officers were out, she slipped into Officers' Hall and went through Chanes' outfit with a fine-tooth comb. And she found —this."

Dramatically he took a small object from his desk and held it up to view. It was a gold circlet attached to a linked gold chain. The circlet pictured a rising sun, with little diamond satellites on the horizon.

"Chanes wore that next to his heart," Starke explained. "He'd been up for a physical examination that afternoon, so he'd left it tucked away in his suitcase. After Miss Walters turned it up, we had him watched every second."

Dick Starke flushed and blurted out, "And you knew that all the time—when he was right in the same room with me!"

Flight Commander Starke smiled tolerantly. "You never would have believed me," he said softly. "You might have —er—spilled the beans to Chanes, and then we would have lost that much ground. After all, he was like a second brother to you—wasn't he, Starke?"

Craig Starke's nearest of kin blushed furiously. The rest of the pilots took the cue and trooped quietly out of the room, grinning broadly. Bea walked over to Dick's side and put her arm through his.

"It's just one of those things, Dick," she murmured.

Flight Commander Starke rubbed his chin. "I'm afraid the little lady's right, Dick," he said, in a smile that was anything but official.

The youngster's head jerked up. He saw that smile.

"Oh! So you weren't sore at me! You—"

"Sure I was sore at you—still am. I want you to be a doctor, not a space gunner. Hell, Dick, you ought to know that a fellow can't show favoritism in this man's airforce. Bad for morale, discipline—"

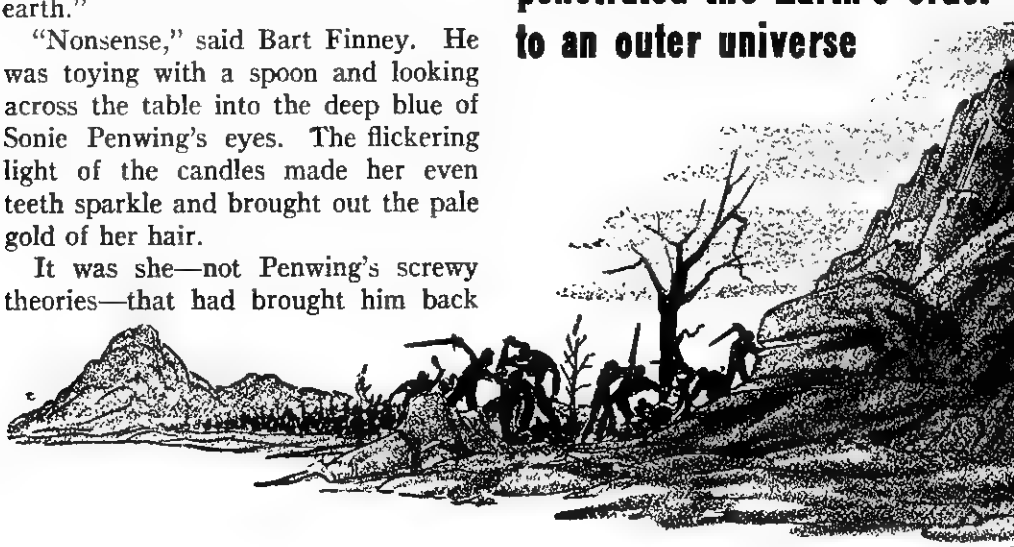
Dick strode forward and made a pass at his brother. Starke ducked, caught him about the middle and dragged him to a bench, kicking furiously. He laid him out over his knee, flexed his big hard palm and brought it

(Concluded on page 67)

The INCREDIBLE THEORY OF DR. PENWING

by Richard O. Lewis

Dr. Penwing certainly didn't anticipate the danger that would face him when he penetrated the Earth's crust to an outer universe



"AND," continued Dr. Penwing as he leaned back in his chair from the candle-lit dinner table, "I can now prove beyond a shadow of doubt that we are living on the concave side—the inside—of the earth."

"Nonsense," said Bart Finney. He was toying with a spoon and looking across the table into the deep blue of Sonie Penwing's eyes. The flickering light of the candles made her even teeth sparkle and brought out the pale gold of her hair.

It was she—not Penwing's screwy theories—that had brought him back to the Penwing home for the week-end.

"But we can do it!" Penwing's bird-like eyes were glowing with excitement. "Tomorrow morning at dawn, we shall prove to the skeptics of the world that my theory is right!"

"Where do you get that 'we' stuff?" The spoon dropped from Bart's fingers. "If you think I am going with you on another wild-goose chase . . ."

"But it's perfectly simple," Penwing insisted. "We'll go through the *outer crust to the outside of the world!*"

Bart felt a chill go through him. He looked quickly at Penwing. Was the man mad? Hadn't the results of that last trip been sufficient to discourage him?

There was no reason for the insane act, but Bart Finney launched himself savagely at the hairy wild man

"I have everything ready." Penwing got up from his chair. "We'll follow one of the straight-line routes. If we leave at dawn tomorrow, we can be back by noon." He hurried around the table toward the stairs.

"Wait a minute!" Bart found his voice. "If you think I'm going with you . . ."

"Fine! Fine!" said Penwing from the stairs. "Then it's all settled. We'll leave at dawn!"

"But I didn't say . . ."

Penwing didn't hear him. The little doctor hurried up the stairs to vanish from sight at the top.

BART was seated on the couch before the glowing fireplace. Sonie was at his side, her slim hand in his own.

"I don't like this idea of your father's even a little bit," he told her. "It's dangerous. He'll get hurt one of these days."

She laughed gaily. "I'm not worried about father," she said. "Personally, I think he'll never get any farther than the back yard."

"Just the same," Bart said, "I don't like it. I went on one voyage with him.* I don't want any more."

Sonie's brow wrinkled. "Then you won't go tomorrow?"

Bart shook his head and held her hand a little tighter.

"No, Sonie, I'm not going. I came here to be with you. And I don't want to spend the week-end chasing around somewhere in a space ship or a ground ship—or whatever it is he has this time."

Sonie's blue eyes were serious as she looked up into his.

"But you've got to go with him. You don't know father. Don't you see? He won't give you a moment's rest until you go. And you may as well get it over with. That's the only way you can be sure of having peace while you're here."

Bart was thoughtful for a few moments.

"Maybe you're right," he said finally, and slid an arm about Sonie's shoulder. He was beginning to realize that he would do most anything, just to be near her for two uninterrupted days . . .

Dawn found Bart within the confines of Dr. Penwing's new ship. As near as he could tell, it was much the same as the last contrivance of Penwing's that he had entered, except that it was about twice as big and had a larger control board set near one wall.

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* In the March, 1940, issue of AMAZING STORIES, Dr. Penwing advanced the theory that the universe was *inside* the earth, and that we are living on the inside curve, rather than the outside curve, of our world. Thus, all of the universe, the sun, the stars, etc., were enclosed in our world. In this world, gravity was not a mysterious power, but simply centrifugal force, exactly like the force that holds water in a bucket when we whirl it over our head.

Due to Penwing's earth spinning on its axis, all space within the earth spins in a like manner. The space nearest the earth's surface naturally spins at the same speed as the earth, while the space further from the surface spins less and less until, near the vortex, it is not moving at all. (Suspend a bucket of water from a long string and start it to spinning vigorously. You will notice that the water nearest the inside surface of the bucket will soon take up the spinning while the water near the center of the bucket will remain unmoved.)

Light-rays follow this natural curvature of space. Rays from the sun reach that part of the earth nearest it, but the sun's rays curve back upon themselves before reaching the far side of the earth. In this way day and night are accounted for. The moon is seen on the dark side of the earth because the rays of the sun are relayed from the moon by a second curve.

Forces of gravity also follow the curvature of space. (Place a small object in the water near the inner surface of your whirling bucket. You will notice that the object "falls" to the side of the bucket in a decided curve.) Gravity, then, becomes but a simple centrifugal force.

Now, in this new story, Dr. Penwing voyages through the earth's crust, to the world *outside* the earth.—Ed.

The little doctor wasted no time. He went directly to the controls. A slight shudder ran through the entire ship as he pressed a switch after making several adjustments. They were off.

Bart sat down in a chair near one wall. He was glad Penwing was hurrying things up, glad that he would soon get back to Sonie.

Penwing turned from the controls, his eyes sparkling with excitement.

"Young man," he said, "we are now on our way. Once we pierce the outer crust and return to prove that there is an *outside* to our earth, the skeptics will be forced to believe in my theory."

Bart felt the pull of gravity leave his body—as if the ship were accelerating downward beneath him. A sudden feeling of alarm gripped him. What if this machine of Penwing's *was* digging down into the earth? What if it struck a pool of molten rock? Or what if it dug down a hundred feet or so, and then ran out of energy or broke down?

And then new fears struck him. What if Penwing's theory of the earth was right? What if the machine *did* reach the outer crust? What then? Would it go flying off into space?

Bart's throat was dry. "You can't dig down through the earth," he said suddenly. "It's too far. No machine could carry enough fuel with it to supply that amount of energy."

"Marvelous!" complimented Penwing. "A truly scientific deduction!" Then he shook his head. "But, of course, we aren't digging. We are merely sliding through, sliding through the crust as a hot knife slides through butter."

SO Bart felt better. That last statement of Penwing's gave him hope. The machine wasn't digging. And it couldn't be *sliding* through. Bart was certain of that. Then, in spite of the feeling of acceleration, they weren't going anywhere; they were still out in the back yard.

"The earth is like a bubble," Penwing was explaining. "And we are living on the inside, where all things are curved—light-rays, gravity, everything. A drop of water is curved; atoms—the very nature of things—are round, and even the electrons within the atoms must travel upon circular orbits. We are living in a curved dimension . . ."

But Bart wasn't listening. For some reason, he was swaying crazily about on his chair. His head was becoming giddy, and a feeling of nausea was toying at his stomach with tickling fingers.

He clutched the sides of his chair as his body went swooping downward in a gigantic, sickening curve, faster and faster. Then there came a sudden breath-taking loop at the bottom, and he felt himself soaring upward again, only to go whizzing off on an erratic tangent.

He remembered where he had had a similar sensation. On a roller-coaster. Yes, that was it. Only this was a thousand times worse.

Again, he felt his body poise on the brink of an awful plunge.

Penwing was saying, "A straight line, being entirely foreign to the curved dimension, can pass through that dimension with but slight resistance. But it would seem to us of the curved dimension that we were actually going through a series of erratic curves and loops, like—well, like being on a giant roller-coaster."

Bart was hanging on for his life, holding his breath, waiting for the next terrifying loop.

"We will continue to accelerate until we reach a halfway point," Penwing was continuing. "Then we shall begin to slow down."

Bart's brain felt like a dish-rag that

had been left too long in a spinning washing machine.

He looked up dizzily at Penwing. The little doctor was standing by the controls, his feet wide apart against the sway of the ship, his face beaming with complete satisfaction.

A movement near the controls caught Bart's eye, and he wheeled around. A choking sound escaped his lips, and for a moment he thought he was going mad.

There, coming from behind the control board where she had been hiding, was Sonie. She pressed one hand tightly to her forehead and stood there swaying on her feet. Her face was pale and her eyes were out of focus. She seemed about to fall.

Bart struggled from his chair. He was conscious of raising one foot high in the air, as if trying to step over some obstacle. Then the floor came slamming upward against his foot and sent him staggering away, off balance.

He reached Sonie's side on the third try, and the girl toppled forward into his arms, to send them both reeling back against the side of the machine.

Moments later, Bart had got her to a chair and was seated beside her. She was clinging to him.

"I—I wanted to be with you," she sobbed. "But I—I didn't expect—this . . ."

BART heard Penwing telling her she shouldn't have come. He could see them both dimly. His brain felt all shredded and soggy.

First, he and Sonie would be soaring high into the air; next, the whole bottom would drop out of things, to let them go swooping down—down—down into a bottomless pit filled with twisted gyrations.

It seemed to Bart that he sat there for hours, holding Sonie's hand, before a semblance of rational thought returned. He saw Penwing, now pale and shaken, peering intently at the controls.

"We're slowing down," said Penwing over his shoulder. "We're just about there. Another moment or two . . ."

Despite the now obvious slowing down, Bart was still nauseated and somewhat dizzy. And, too, there was something else—a high-pitched ringing in his ears, a vibration that seemed to pierce his brain through and through.

He turned to Sonie. "It's all right," he told her. "In spite of all this Coney Island stuff, I think we are still right out in the back yard where we—"

"We're here!" shouted Penwing. "We have penetrated the crust! Now the skeptics must believe!"

Bart was on his feet. "Open that door," he said. "I've had enough. I'm getting out of here." He turned to the girl. "Come on, Sonie."

Penwing was fumbling with the door. He threw it open finally and, without a backward glance, hurried out through the black aperture that separated the straight-line dimension from the curved dimension.

Bart got a new thought. "Better wait here, Sonie," he said. "I want to take a look first—just to make sure."

He went to the door and stepped through. Instantly, the vibration bit deeper into his brain, became painful.

Blinking his eyes against the glare of sunlight, Bart looked around. Then he just stood there rooted to the spot, his mouth hanging open in amazement at the sight that met his eyes.

CHAPTER II

Disaster

ALL about him was a rocky, dust-strewn landscape with here and

there lonely crags and dead trees that lifted white, naked branches into the silver of the sky. There was no sign of living vegetation.

Beyond the trees, and a little to the right, arose the jagged walls of an ancient city. And halfway between Bart and the walls of the city, there stretched a long line of battling men and beasts.

Hoarse shouts, cries and the clanging of steel against steel filled the air, and over it all came the strange vibration that was slowly eating into Bart's brain.

Through a rift in the cloud of dust that hung about the fighters, Bart caught sight of tall, bronze-skinned men, their swords flashing in the light. The men were being hard pressed by a horde of savage, squat creatures with hairy skins. Here and there, towering high above the heads of the other fighters, were great, apelike beasts who swung heavy clubs.

Even as Bart watched, the ranks of the bronzed men broke. The sound of a horn rang out above the din of battle, and the men began a swift but well-ordered retreat.

"They are coming this way," said Bart. "They'll be here in a minute. We've got to get back in the ship and get out of here."

He turned to Penwing—to get the shock of his life.

Penwing was g l a r i n g at h i m with wide, animal-like eyes. He was crouched down and his lips were drawn back in a vicious snarl.

"Now what's got wrong with you?" said Bart.

In answer, Penwing sprang straight at his throat, his hands clawing and a bestial growl issuing from his twisted lips.

Bart leaped quickly aside to avoid the mad rush. Then he stood there in bewilderment. The vibration in his brain seemed to have robbed him of all power to think.

Penwing had recovered from his charge and was turning about, his face twisting savagely.

Something had snapped in Bart's brain. He didn't know what it was. It just seemed that he couldn't think any longer. He was conscious of his actions, but had no control over them.

A low snarl came to his ears. He was surprised to find that the snarl came from his own lips! And he was even more surprised to find that he was crouching and circling about Penwing, his own hands extended clawlike!

A warm haze of madness was floating about him. He wanted to kill, to feel warm blood on his hands. He wanted to tear Penwing limb from limb.

Then the little doctor was upon him, snarling, biting and clawing. Bart flung him away, saw him go rolling over and over in the dust.

With an insane shout of victory upon his lips, he sprang toward the fallen man, ready for the kill.

But Bart never reached Penwing. At that moment, something leaped into his path, barring his way. It was one of the apelike creatures. It was at least seven feet tall, and stood there with heavy club swinging idly at its side.

Bart knew that he should be surprised and frightened at sight of the beast; but he wasn't, he wanted only to kill.

Penwing, who had recovered from his fall, made a sudden flying tackle from behind that sent the brute stumbling. Bart's own quick charge sent both man and beast tumbling to the earth. His fingers sought out the nearest throat and began clawing at it.

HEAVY hands fell upon his shoulders from above, hands that dragged him quickly upward. He jerked

loose from their grasp and wheeled about, to find himself confronted by several of the strange, bronze-skinned men. Their faces were haggard and smudged with the grime of battle. Each wore leather trappings and a headpiece of dull metal.

With a cry upon his lips, Bart sprang among them.

After that, things about him became confused to his aching brain. He was dimly conscious of the huge, hairy arms that encircled him crushingly from behind, and he felt himself being lifted upward to be thrown over a broad shoulder.

Then the din of battle was all about him, and the beast began to run away, taking long, jolting strides. Consciousness slipped slowly away.

* * *

THOUGHTS were hammering at Bart's brain, strange thoughts that were entirely alien to him—as if some brain other than his own were thinking them.

He opened his eyes slowly, to find himself looking up into a star-clustered sky. The stars were vaguely familiar, except that some of them seemed to be in the wrong places.

Three men were sitting at a small fire near him. Bart could not understand the words they spoke to each other, but the interplay of their *thoughts* raced through his brain with startling clarity. They were wondering who he was and where he was from. It was like speaking, this mental telepathy, so accurately was everything understood.

Bart struggled to a sitting position and put a hand to his throbbing head. He found there a helmet similar to those worn by the three men. Its weight seemed to be crushing him, and he tried to remove it.

One of the men hurriedly caught his hand and spoke to him. Bart could not understand the words, but the meaning of them came clear to him. It was as if the man had said,

"You must leave it on. The metal stops the vibration of madness."

Bart looked around. All about him, bronzed men were clustered about camp fires. And great, hairy beasts, like the one who had carried him from the midst of battle that afternoon, were here and there among them. The jagged walls of the ancient city frowned down not over a stone's throw away.

"Where am I?" Bart wanted to know.

"I am Dalk," said the man who had stopped Bart from removing his helmet, "Captain of the tribes of Dallon from the East. And this," he indicated the man to his right, "is Dallum, whose timely arrival this afternoon with his tribes from the South saved my men from being wiped out by the Kez."

He placed his hand affectionately upon the shoulder of a young man about Bart's own age. The youth's face glowed in the light of the fire, but his eyes were strangely hollow.

"My son, Dakkar."

Bart nodded and Dalk continued, "You are in the land of Tarret, near the walls of the hated city of Kezlan."

"And is this Tarret upon the inside or the outside of the earth?" Bart wanted to know.

Dalk frowned. "It is *on* the earth," he said. "But I supposed everybody knew that the earth is flat and surrounded by uncharted seas."

BART clutched his head and groaned. Things were getting all mixed up in his confused brain.

Then a distressing thought struck him and he sat bolt upright.

"Where is Sonie and Penwing?"

"The man went back to the place where we found you," said Dalk. "He

should be back shortly. He spoke of a girl."

"Yes," said Bart. "His daughter. Is she all right?"

Dalk shook his head. "That I know not. As the Kez drove us back this afternoon, we found the two of you afflicted with the vibration of madness. We saw nothing else."

Bart felt more at ease. Sonie had evidently remained in the ship unnoticed.* Once Penwing located the ship and found her, there would be nothing to prevent them from returning immediately to Penwing's back yard.

"You think strange thoughts," said Dalk. "Thoughts I cannot understand. Who are you and from whence do you come?"

"I am Bart Finney and I come from . . . " He broke off, not knowing how to explain Penwing's theory to this man who believed the earth to be flat.

"Who are the Kez?" he asked quickly. "And what is this vibration of madness?"

Dalk's lean face grew stern in the light of the fire.

"The Kez," he said, "are the men of Kezlan who are ruled by a beast called Kezlar in the walled city we are attacking. Not long ago, Kezlar demanded that we, the Dallons, leave the lands that have been ours for centuries and move back into the hills. Naturally, we refused."

Bart saw the mists that gathered in the old man's eyes. "Then came the vibration of madness. Men and beasts alike fought each other until death, and our crops withered and died in our fruitful fields.

"The wise men of my own city developed a helmet of magnetic metal that strengthened our brains against the vibration and made the thoughts of one known to the other, even without speaking. We who were thus protected spent days in the capture of those who were mad."

Dalk shook his head sadly. "The few of us who are now left alive are protected; but we could do nothing to save the crops. Nothing will grow as long as the vibration continues."

"You mean," said Bart, "that this Kezlar fellow is deliberately killing your people and starving you out with the vibration of madness, so that he can gain your lands?"

Dalk nodded. "Yes. We are faced with slow starvation, for we have but little food stored within our cities."

He rose and faced the city of Kezlan, from the walls of which came intermittent shouts and taunts.

"But we intend to fight. The Kez have food enough for all stored within their city. We attack at dawn. It is better to die in battle against the walls than . . ."

He broke off as hurried footsteps approached the fire. It was Penwing and three bronzed warriors. Bart was on his feet in an instant.

"You found the ship? Sonie is all right? We can go back—"

He stopped short. Penwing's face was haggard with agony. He seemed about to collapse.

Bart leaped to his side, clutched his shoulder.

"Sonie!" he cried. "Where is she?"

Bart saw the dazed look that was in Penwing's eyes as the little doctor turned to face him.

"Sonie was—was not in the ship."

"You . . . you mean . . . " Bart could not put his terrifying thoughts into words.

Penwing nodded slowly. "The Kez. They have taken her."

* Penwing's strange ship was built along the straight-line dimension and, therefore, was invisible to eyes that were constructed to see only within the confines of the normal curved dimension.—Ed.

CHAPTER III

Blackout

HOT, uncontrollable anger surged up within Bart as he stood there. It pervaded his whole being. And yet, he felt helpless. His hands clenched and unclenched slowly as he turned to face the high walls of Kezlan. Sonie was there, behind those walls!

Dalk must have read the thought that was taking form in Bart's brain.

"You can't do it," he said. "The Kez will kill you. They are not like us. They are beasts."

Bart got the mental picture of the Kez that was in Dalk's mind. He saw them as squat, hairy brutes with flat, elongated heads, small, red eyes and ugly, protruding teeth.

And they had Sonie . . .

He wheeled to Penwing. "It was you!" he cried. "You and your crazy theory—"

Seeing the pain that was already in the little doctor's eyes, he broke off.

"Don't worry," he said finally. "We'll get her. We'll get her out of there if I have to tear down the walls with my bare hands!"

"Then I go with you." It was Dakkar, son of Dalk. "I, too, have a girl. Hunger is taking the glow from her cheeks."

Dalk raised a restraining hand. "Wait. The two of you can accomplish nothing. We attack at dawn . . ."

"But why wait until dawn?" Bart wanted to know. "Why not attack tonight? Where are your engines of war, your battering rams, catapults?"

Dalk's brows furrowed in thought. "You speak of strange things. I understand them not."

"What?" Bart was dumfounded. "You mean you have no machines with which to destroy the wall? You mean you have only your swords with which to attack?"

It was incredible that these people who knew of such things as magnetism and vibration had no knowledge of the simple machines of warfare.

"We are a peaceful people," said Dalk, "unskilled in the art of war. This is the first occasion we have had to make war upon an enemy."

"But surely you have some plan of attack, some scheme for breaking down the walls or for forcing the gates!"

"We have our swords and our slings," said Dalk. Then he indicated the group of apelike beasts that had gathered to themselves about fires of their own. "And we have the Gorkins. Each is as strong as ten good men."

"But even if the walls are gained," Dakkar put in, "there still remains the castle in the center of the city. It is a stronghold." He turned to Bart. "There is no doubt but that Kezlar has there the girl you call Sonie."

Bart became thoughtfully silent. It would take the Dallons and the Gorkins long days to force their way into the city if ever. More days to force the castle. During that time, what would happen to this starving army? And what would happen to Sonie?

He turned hopefully to Dr. Penwing. But Penwing was seated alone near one of the fires. His dazed eyes were devoid of expression as he sat there hammering a spare helmet to bits upon a granite stone—as if Sonie's capture had been a greater shock than his senses would stand.

A sudden thought tore itself through Bart's brain. The space ship! They could return to Penwing's back yard in the ship, get dynamite, guns, ammunition . . .

BUT what if something went wrong with the ship? What if Penwing

was in no condition to run it? *What if they never got back to Sonie?* He shook the thought quickly from his head.

Bart knew that he would have little difficulty in getting the idea of battering rams and catapults across to Dalk. But what immediate good would come of it? It would take days to construct those huge engines of war. And during that time . . .

Then his mind was made up. Come what may, he would get over those walls to Sonie—if only to die by her side!

Dakkar, standing near him, must have read his thoughts, for he handed Bart a heavy, golden-hilted sword that dangled from a wide belt of leather.

"I go with you," he said.

Bart buckled on the sword, shook his head.

"No. I go alone. One will stand a much better chance than two."

"But you can never get to the walls undetected," reasoned Dalk. "They will be waiting for you."

"I have a plan," said Bart. He placed a hand upon Dakkar's shoulder. "I'll need your help, son."

The wall was not more than a hundred yards away. Bart, with Dakkar at his side and ten fighting men of Dallon at his back, made a sudden dash for it through the night. Shouts rang out from the walls above as they approached. Stones began to rain down. A man at Bart's back stopped dead in his tracks as a hurled rock split his metal helmet.

Then they were in the shadows of the wall, the men showering stones upward with their slings.

"As soon as I am out of sight," Bart whispered to Dakkar, "retreat. There is no need in wasting the lives of good men."

With that, he turned quickly to his left and sprinted through the shadows at the base of the wall.

A firebrand swished down through the darkness. But by the time it flared up to light the scene, Bart was yards away from that section of the wall.

He looked back to see what was left of the men who had accompanied him. They were beating a hasty retreat. Their short charge had served its purpose. In the confusion, Bart had got away undetected.

Sliding silently through the shadows, he continued his way along the wall, careful of the dead men and jumbled stones beneath his feet.

Fifteen minutes later, he was at a section of the wall far from the main gate of the city, before which glowed the camp fires of the Dallons. He guessed that the wall above would be guarded only by occasional sentries. If he could but gain the top, slip through those sentries . . .

Something barred his way. It was the thick trunk of a huge tree that had evidently been placed there against the wall that afternoon by a scaling party. The dead bodies of Dallons and Gorkins that lay piled about the base of the tree, bore mute evidence that the attack had failed with heavy losses.

Bart got a firm hold on a jagged stone that protruded from the wall and, with the aid of the tree trunk, began pulling himself slowly and silently upward.

The going was easier and swifter once he reached the branches of the tree. The sword he wore clanked once against the rock wall. He stopped, listening and waiting; but no sound of alarm came from above.

AFTER a time, he continued upward. The top of the wall became faintly visible just above his head, outlined against the dark sky. Beneath him were shadows and a sheer drop of twenty feet.

Slowly and carefully, his hands found

a hold and he drew himself up until he could see along the top of the wall. None of the beast-men of Kez were in sight, and not a sound reached his ears. A moment later, he drew himself up and over the top of the stone.

It was then that the shout of alarm rang out.

Bart saw the squat figure racing toward him with club raised. Even in the dark, he noted the brutelike appearance of the Kez, saw the flat head with its metal band, the short, muscular arms and legs and the twisted, hair-covered mouth.

Bart did not wait for the beast to reach him. Sweeping his sword free, he leaped forward and sent the blade downward in a slanting arc, to bite deep into the base of the thick neck and silence the beast-man's shouting for all time.

But the alarm had been given. Figures leaped up from where they had been sleeping along the top of the wall, rushed forward.

A club whizzed through the air to strike heavily against Bart's shoulder. Then they were charging him, yelling and screaming, dozens of them.

There was no retreat. Behind lay shadows and death.

Bart sent his sword licking about him as they closed in. But the sheer weight of their numbers drove him backward; and he knew from the start that he would stand no chance against them.

A flying club or a stone smashed against his helmet with stunning force, staggering him. He stumbled back to the edge of the wall, felt one foot contact but thin air. Then he was falling, falling backward and downward into nothingness.

He was but dimly conscious of striking the branches of the tree beneath him, hanging among them for a moment and then sliding and tumbling down, with thoughts of Sonie spinning in his brain.

CHAPTER IV

Hell on Earth

THE pale glow of dawn was flooding the sky when Bart opened his eyes. By the thoughts that struck his brain and by the sounds that reached his ears, he knew he was back in the camp of the Dallons. All about him were sounds of activity.

Dakkar leaned over him. "I brought you back from the wall," he said. "I saw you fall, and went to you. You were in a bad way, unconscious. I gave you a drug so that you might rest."

Bart got slowly to his feet. In spite of the bruises about his body, he felt physically rested.

He looked about to see Gorkins carrying heavy trees upon their shoulders to various points about the camp. The Dallons were busy constructing something from the huge trunks.

Dakkar answered his unasked question.

"The man you call Penwing told my father how to construct the things you call battering rams."

Bart wheeled about. "Where is Penwing?" he wanted to know.

Dakkar shook his head. "I know not. For a long time, after I brought you back last night, he acted strangely and thought still stranger thoughts. He walked back and forth through the camp, speaking to no one, counting his steps as he went and stopping now and again to look at a queer instrument he held in his hands. Since then, no one has seen him."

Bart groaned inwardly. Penwing, dazed by Sonie's capture, had probably wandered off somewhere.

There was enough light in the sky for Bart to get a good look at the walls of the city and of the stone castle with-

in, the castle where Sonie . . .

Hot rage boiled up in him. "How long will it take to complete those rams?" he demanded.

"Maybe this afternoon," said Dakkar. "Maybe tomorrow."

"But . . . " Bart broke off. Two Gorkins came by, a heavy tree upon their shoulders. "How heavy is that tree?" he asked Dakkar quickly.

"It would take twenty men to carry it," said Dakkar. "But two Gorkins carry it as easily as . . . "

"Twenty men! Wait!" A plan was leaping through Bart's brain. Even as all the details became suddenly complete, he knew that he or Penwing or one of the Dallons should have thought of it hours ago.

Dakkar's eyes glowed as he read the plan that was in the other's mind.

"It will work!" he shouted. "I shall send word to my father immediately. He is in command at another gate. All the gates of Kezlan shall fall this day!"

Then a shadow crossed his brow. "But the castle . . . "

"Come on," said Bart. "We'll take care of the castle when we reach it! Instruct your men!"

A half hour later, Bart and Dakkar stood side by side before the gates of Kezlan. At either side of the gate, back out of range of the stones being hurled by the Kez, were a hundred men of Dallon, their slings held in readiness.

Behind Bart and Dakkar were some two score Gorkins. They were shouting and laughing and brandishing their clubs in anticipation.

Several hundred beast-men of Kez danced about on the broad top of the wall, waving clubs and swords, hurling taunts and stones.

"Let 'em have it!" said Bart.

DAKKAR'S sword made a short flourish in the light of the morning sun and a command left his lips.

The Dallons put their slings into instant action.

Shrill shouts of pain and rage came from the walls as the unexpected barrage of missiles struck home. Some of the Kez plummeted to earth; the others leaped for safety behind the parapet.

"Now!" shouted Bart.

From behind him rushed ten Gorkins, five to each side of a giant tree trunk, the butt of which had been hacked to a blunt point.

Bart marveled at their speed and strength as they pounded past him, straight toward the gates of Kezlan, gathering momentum as they went.

A great shout of alarm rang out from all along the walls, as the Kez caught sight of that strange machine of destruction that came speeding toward the gates. They began hurling down stones upon the heads of the Gorkins.

"Keep those walls clear!" Bart was shouting with all the strength of his lungs. "Clear them off!"

But the men of Dallon needed no encouragement. They were advancing slowly and methodically toward the walls on either side of the gateway, their slings working rhythmically. The beast-men of Kez were dropping from the walls like sprayed flies, some of them still clutching in their lifeless arms the stones they were about to throw.

There came a dull, crashing thud as the heavy tree smashed squarely into the gates, weakening them from top to bottom. The Gorkins went tumbling about, propelled by their own momentum. Some of them got hurriedly to their feet to drag the tree aside.

A similar crash came as an echo from farther along the wall, where Dalk's men were employing similar tactics at another gate.

"We've got a system now," shouted Bart as the Dallons again cleared the

walls and the Gorkins came racing through with another tree. "Organization! Something they can't understand!"

Hot wine seemed to be flowing through his veins, exhilarating him, filling him with buoyant excitement. His body tensed as the second tree struck home. A shout of triumph left his lips as he saw the narrow gap that had appeared between the gates. The one on the left was hanging loosely.

Behind the gates were hordes of Kez. They were throwing their weight against the gates, trying to close them.

The third tree smacked squarely into the loosened left one, sent it smashing back upon the heads of the screaming, shouting Kez.

The Gorkins went tumbling through the breach, Bart and Dakkar close upon their heels.

Heavy stones crashed down from the walls above. But the Gorkins had already cleared a semicircle in the ranks of the defenders behind the gate.

Bart found a place beside a huge Gorkin who was cracking heads with his club, holding a squirming Kez before him as a shield.

Several of the Gorkins had fallen, evidently struck down by the stones from above. Bart saw the round, bloodshot eyes of one—a Gorkin with a huge, opened mouth that was sending out snarls and roars at the Kez that swarmed about him; saw the sudden look of surprise that flooded the Gorkin's face as a sword in the hands of a squat, burly Kez severed the Gorkin's head from its body.

BART'S own sword avenged the Gorkin's death.

Then came the men of Dallon in a solid wall, their swords bristling before them. Stones rained down, depleting their ranks as they spread out fanwise.

"Get away from the walls!" Bart shouted. "The stones . . ."

Something clanged against his own helmet with a stunning force that sent him to his knees. A Kez was over him instantly, sword raised, evil face twisted.

But the sword did not descend. Dakkar wheeled suddenly, sideswiped the beast-man and turned again to resume the work that was before him.

Bart got to his feet just as the second group of Dallons charged through the gate. Their savage onslaught set the Kez back on their heels, carried the tide of battle away from the gates and out of range of the stones.

The smell of dust, mixed with the odor of sweating bodies and freshly spilled blood, bit at Bart's flaring nostrils as he fought his way ahead, foot by foot.

He realized now that the taking of Kezlan would be no small matter. They were outnumbered by the Kez at least two to one. The fighting would be slow and bitter, from house to house, from street to street.

Ahead, looming large in the center of the city, was the castle, the castle where Sonie was being held prisoner. If he could but reach it, get to Sonie's side . . .

A lane appeared just ahead where a mighty Gorkin had thinned the ranks of the Kez before being beaten down. Without a thought for his own personal safety, Bart dashed through, split the face of a beast-man who attempted to cut his legs from beneath him, and hurled another from his path.

A distant crash, followed by a mighty shout, reached his ears as he sped away from the din of battle at his back.

"My father has taken the second gate! He enters the city."

It was Dakkar. He, too, had come

through the ranks of the Kez and was sprinting desperately to keep up with Bart's mad pace.

A thrown club whizzed between them.

"They can't catch us," Dakkar panted. "Their legs are too short."

Bart slowed a bit. "You shouldn't have come," he said.

Dakkar held out his sword at arm's length as he ran.

"This blade shall drink the blood of Kezlar this day—or I die!"

A clumsy drawbridge had already been raised from over the moatlike ditch that surrounded the entire castle. Even as Bart and Dakkar reached the brink, the ditch began to fill with water that gushed from some hidden source.

"The Gorkins can never break down the gates of the castle," breathed Dakkar. "The moat will be filled before they reach here."

Together, they splashed through the knee-deep water, found a small door in the castle wall and flung it open. Two surprised Kez met almost instantaneous death.

"We can't take the castle alone," whispered Dakkar as they sped along the narrow corridor.

"Did you ever hear of a bluff?" said Bart.

There was the sound of many voices just ahead. The corridor turned sharply, and Bart and Dakkar found themselves looking into a great, circular room filled with milling Kez, hundreds of them.

Across the room was a raised dais. And there, upon a crude throne, sat Kezlar.

EVEN at that distance, Bart saw the paunchy belly and the ugly head that was at least twice the size of that of the other Kez. About him was none of the dignity that marks the monarch. He sat there pawing over a bowl of fruit near his side.

"Men of Kez!" said Bart. "Your hour has come. The city has fallen and men of Dallon are within your castle."

Bart's voice was commanding. Every eye in the room turned toward the two lone men who stood in the doorway. A stupefied silence fell over the entire group.

Bart was quick to take advantage of his lead. Followed by Dakkar, he marched majestically toward the throne through the bewildered Kez, who fell back to make a path for him.

If he could but once get his hands on Kezlar . . .

Kezlar had paused in mid-action, a grape in his hairy fingers on its way to his sagging mouth. His small eyes were nearly popping from their sockets.

"Command your men to lay down their arms!" said Bart from the foot of the dais. "Further fighting is useless. The city of Kezlan has . . ."

"Bart! Bart!" Sonie came flying down the steps from somewhere behind the throne. She threw herself into his arms. "Bart!" she sobbed. "I knew you would come . . ."

Bart became conscious of the suddenly renewed activity at his back. Clawing hands clutched him, dragged him away from Sonie, pinioned his arms at his sides. Two of the Kez pulled Sonie away from him and back up the steps from whence she had come.

Dakkar's sword clattered to the stone floor as five of the beast-men overpowered him.

"So!" said Kezlar. "The castle has fallen!" He plopped the grape into his mouth and leaned forward, a leer of triumph upon his black, hairy face. "But your thoughts belie your words. There are but the two of you."

Bart had forgotten for the moment

that here in this strange land, it was thought-vibrations rather than spoken words that counted. And here in the castle thought-vibrations seemed to be even stronger than they were on the outside.

To the left of the throne, and set into the wall, was a maze of spinning disks. They seemed to be made of glass, but were spinning so rapidly as to be but a blur to the eye. Bart guessed that here was the source of the vibration of madness, and decided that the nearness of the source probably also had something to do with the strengthening of thought-transference.

"The Dallons will never take the castle," went on Kezlar. He seemed more interested in the bunch of grapes in his hand than in the two men before him. "Even if they win against heavy odds in the city, they will slowly starve anyway. There is no food within the city; it is stored here in the castle."

Bart felt the hopelessness of his situation. The Dallons could not take the castle. That was certain. And he and Dakkar were being held helpless, awaiting whatever fate Kezlar had in store for them—and Sonie.

Kezlar was continuing, "The girl has thoughts of a strange world somewhere beyond this one, a world where there are riches and beauty. She has also thoughts of a ship just outside the walls of the city, a ship sufficiently large to carry many men to that far-off land of yours."

HE plucked another grape from a bunch and held it speculatively between thumb and finger.

"After the Dallons have starved and after I have devised a suitable death for the two of you who have forced your way into my castle, I shall search out the ship.

"With the help of the girl, I shall go to this land of yours and bring its people to their knees as I have the Dallons."

"You can't do it!" Bart ground out. "There is no place for such as you among my people! They would laugh at you, place you in a cage beside the apes and monkeys!"

"Enough!" Kezlar leaned forward, his lips drawn back to expose yellowed, protruding teeth. "So! Your people would laugh at me!" His face twisted grotesquely.

"But would they laugh when the vibration of madness struck into their brains? Would they laugh when all growing things began to wither? Would they laugh while each was tearing out the throat of the other?"

Bart went cold inside as Kezlar's mad plan became clear to his brain. The beast would take the vibration of madness to the earth. The trees, grass and flowers would curl and die. Dust would sweep through the cities. Father would turn against son, husband and wife would slay each other in a welter of blood. All would be chaos!

CHAPTER V

The Final Hour

WITH a sudden twisting wrench, Bart jerked himself free from his captors and sent them stumbling away. His fist crashed squarely into the ugly face of one who sought to bar his way. He saw the look of fear that spread over the leering face of Kezlar as the headman pawed desperately at the long knife at his thick bloated torso.

Then a row of swordsmen sprang between Bart and his quarry, and several more grappled his legs and leaped upon his back to bring him heavily to the floor.

A moment later, he was jerked

roughly to his feet.

Kezlar had regained his composure, but ill-concealed rage was darkening his narrowed eyes. Bart knew that his failure to reach Kezlar had sealed his fate.

"So!" said the beast-man. "The desire for battle runs high within you. We shall see if we can satisfy that desire."

He leaned back in his throne, his gloating eyes traveling from Bart to Dakkar.

"Waiting for the Dallons to starve would bore me. I and my men crave entertainment. It will be amusing to watch the two of you destroy each other."

Dakkar drew himself up proudly. "You are the only one I kill this day, monkey-man."

The word was obviously an insult bitterly distasteful to the Kez. Kezlar's hand flashed to his knife. Then he checked his anger. In his eyes smoldered a diabolical glow as he reached into the bowl for another bunch of grapes.

"You will have different thoughts," he said, "when the helmet is taken from your head to let the vibration of madness creep into your brain."

Bart felt his mouth grow ashy as he caught the full significance of the hideous plan that was slithering through Kezlar's bestial head.

His struggles were useless. At a command from the beast-man, Bart felt his own helmet being removed, saw Dakkar's head being uncovered in a like manner. He knew that he and Dakkar would be tearing at each other's throats within the next minute or two!

A shout of rabid approval went up from the Kez that crowded the room with their stinking bodies. They shoved and jostled one another into a crude circle, forming an arena in which stood Bart and Dakkar and their guards. Bets were being haggled over and placed.

Even above the confusion, Bart felt rather than heard the thin vibration that was shimmering through his brain, filling him with a warm, red glow of blood-lust. He tried to close his mind to it, tried to shake the mad thoughts from his skull.

His futile struggles against the Kez that held his arms and legs brought forth jeers and taunts from the ring of beast-men, heaped kindling fuel on their excitement.

He saw Sonie between her two guards upon the dais, her eyes staring at him, round with terror. From outside came the distant sound of fighting. But the battle was still far from the castle.

Kezlar was leaning back in his seat, his hairy lips curled into a self-satisfied grimace, his protruding teeth nipping grapes from the bunch he held high in his hand.

Bart felt a sword being pressed into his own hand, felt himself being shoved forward as his guards leaped quickly back and away, to melt into the crowded fringe of the circle.

BART did not see Dakkar, who was in the center of the circle with him; his eyes were blazing at the smug beast-man who sat complacently upon the throne gulping grapes. His hand tightened upon the sword as he strode forward, his brain reeking with the madness to kill.

It was the sudden shout of the crowd that warned Bart. He paused in mid-stride as a low snarl reached his ears. It was Dakkar. And Dakkar was charging him with sword leveled, his face twisted hideously with conflicting emotions.

Bart saw Dakkar's blade within a few inches of his own chest. His sword-

arm flew up automatically to parry the thrust; and he felt the point of steel slither numbly into the flesh of his shoulder.

The sight of first blood brought a roar from the pushing and shoving Kez.

A crazy red haze danced before Bart's eyes, and through the mist he saw a slim young man before him, a man who had wounded him. All else was driven from his brain except the mad desire to kill . . . kill . . . kill!

With a wild yell, he leaped forward, evaded the darting blade and came up under the sword-arm of his opponent. Dakkar tore himself free, came charging in again with swinging blade.

Bart jerked back to save his own life. It was then that he stumbled over the extended leg of a shouting Kez, who had obviously placed a bet on the Dallon. Bart went down, struck the back of his head hard against the stone floor as he fell.

Half stunned, he lay there. Dakkar was over him in an instant, his eyes blazing, his twisted lips flecked with foam and his sword raised for the *coup de grâce*.

Bart stared in awful fascination as the blade descended. He knew that death was at hand. Nothing short of a miracle could save him.

The circle of Kez nearest him was crowding over him, shouting for the kill. From the dais came Sonie's scream of anguish.

Then the miracle happened!

The wall of Kez gave way and came tumbling forward, a shouting, screeching mass of flying arms and legs. Bart saw the Kez sweep Dakkar and his blade away, felt them swarm over him in a wave of panic.

The madness was still upon Bart. He began clawing at them as they came, tearing at their hairy throats, and finally surged himself up through them to a standing position.

He caught sight of Dakkar a few yards away. Dakkar's blood-stained sword was hacking and gouging at the backs of the Kez who swarmed and groveled at his feet.

But what was the matter with the Kez? They were not fighting back. They seemed to be fleeing in terror from a spot there in the center of the floor, a vacant spot some fifteen feet in diameter. It was as if some silent bomb had exploded there, to hurl the crowded Kez in all directions.

Even as Bart's confused brain struggled with the problem, a black, irregular blotch appeared there in the nothingness, and out of it stepped a mighty Gorkin, club in hand. The Gorkin charged immediately into the midst of the panic-stricken Kez.

But Bart could not concentrate. The scent of blood was biting at his nostrils and the madness of a crazed beast was eating at his brain, as he struck down the beast-men about him.

GORKIN after Gorkin stepped from the shimmering black blotch; and at last there came a little man with bird-like eyes and wispy gray hair. The little man held a double-barreled shotgun in his hands.

There were no more Kez near Bart or the blank space; only the little man. Bart strode forward, a snarl upon his lips and his sword held in readiness. The man's back was turned to him.

Soft fingers clutched at Bart's arm. He wheeled quickly to face this new adversary.

It was a girl. "Stop, Bart!" she was shouting. "Stop! It's father! Father and his ship . . ."

He flung her away from him, raised his sword. The look of terror in Sonie's eyes as she saw the dripping blade above her head gladdened his heart. And

yet . . .

Something in the back of Bart's brain was screaming to him that the sword should not descend, shouting to him that he was about to destroy his future happiness, the whole fabric of his existence.

But the madness drove him on. The muscles of his arm tensed for the downward swing that would satisfy his lust for blood, thrill him with . . .

Bart heard the explosion at his back. It was so close, it rocked his senses. Something snapped in his brain. And then everything became clear to him.

Dr. Penwing had in some way brought his ship into the castle! Had brought Gorkins with him! And the echoing discharge of his shotgun had momentarily broken the rhythm of the vibration of madness!

The Kez were running wildly about the room, shrieking in terror. A quick step took Bart to the girl's side. He drew her up into his arms, held her close.

"Sonie! Sonie!" he cried.

Penwing let loose with the other barrel directly into the faces of a group of beast-men, who were charging down upon him. Their shouts of pain and surprise filled the room. Many of them threw down their arms and fell to the floor, in silent supplication to this strange person that had appeared out of nothingness.

The little doctor had just finished reloading his weapon when Bart took it from his hands and wheeled about.

On the dais was Dakkar, bleeding from a dozen wounds. His hands were fastened about Kezlar's thick throat, and he was slowly squeezing the life out of the beast-man.

Bart raised the gun to his shoulder. There was something he had to do. Something . . .

The vibration was again eating into his brain, confusing him. He wanted to kill. No, there was something else—

He pulled both triggers simultaneously, felt the double recoil against his shoulder. Across the room from him, the charge of lead shattered the spinning disks, sent broken bits of them whirling and clattering about.

Instantly, the madness left his brain!

Dakkar too seemed free of the madness. He had picked up his sword and was standing there on the dais, momentarily bewildered.

Kezlar, at his back, was quick to take advantage. He jerked the knife from his belt, leaped from the throne and raised the blade high, his face tensed for the kill.

Bart's cry of alarm was unnecessary. Dakkar had sensed the sudden move at his back. He wheeled around, caught Kezlar's knife-arm in his left hand as the blade descended. For a moment, they stood there eye to eye. Then Dakkar's sword began to slide slowly into the beast-man's paunchy belly . . .

Outside, the din of battle had reached the castle walls. Inside, the Kez had laid down their arms and were groveling on the floor. Two Gorkins went to open the gates for the men of Dallon. Stored beneath the castle was food enough for the Dallons and Gorkins until new crops could be planted and harvested . . .

Lack of food, loss of blood and the pounding Bart had taken mentally and physically began to take their toll. He felt as if the whole castle were spinning madly about him.

"Let's—let's get—out of here," he said; and then he toppled forward upon the pile of dead Kez that lay at his feet.

BART awakened to find himself between clean sheets in a bedroom of the Penwing home. His first thought

(Concluded on page 131)

A horrid scream came from Torris lips

The LIVING MIST

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

Warden Lawson had a strange power over the convicts of his prison, but Spike Torri was a different proposition. Then came the Mist—a mist that was *living!* And the life in it was that of Spike Torri!

WARDEN LAWSON sent for "Spike" Torri around three that afternoon. This was another break for me, because the Boston *Times* had sent me down for a Sunday feature and I had run smack into a pair of fair-sized riots. I plastered my eye against the peek-hole in the adjoining room and got ready.

Torri came in a moment later. Slim, dapper even in prison grays, he walked over to stand in front of the warden's big walnut desk.

"What the hell is this?" Lawson barked. "You're not going to make a monkey out of me! Ten years you get for a bank job. So you put on an act when you get here, promise to reform, and like a horse's neck I make you a trusty a year ago. So today we have two riots—count 'em, two!—one in the dining hall, the other in the yard, and you refuse to spill the beans. Louse!"

Torri had been white-faced when he came in. Now the color came back to his cheeks, although his poise had been perfect all through. He rubbed his chin reflectively, grinned—the guy had charm, I'll admit that—and then spread out his hands.

"Warden," he said, "I thought it was about something serious. Like maybe you thought I was the skunk in the woodpile. Now, Warden, you wouldn't want me to be a stool pigeon, would you?"

"Yes," Lawson snapped, "I would! I'm running a prison, not a finishing school. If we don't get to the bottom of this, there'll be more trouble and some guys will get shot. You wouldn't want that to happen, would you?" Lawson pleaded.

Torri shrugged disarmingly. "Just between you and me, Warden," he said, "would that be much of a loss to the world?"

Touché! Lawson sprang up, fists clenched. Torri stood his ground, sure of himself, amused, knowing he was in the clear.

"Get out of my office!" the warden snarled. "Play games with me, huh?"

He advanced threateningly. Torri, half the size of the huge prison official, backed tactfully to the door and felt for the knob.

"By the way, Warden," Torri said as he got the door open, "I'm getting paroled in a month, you know. Going to work in my Dad's wholesale meat business. And," he added softly, "your daughter promised to marry me when I drove her to town yesterday."

"What!" Lawson got apoplectic. "How dare you say such a thing! Why, you're only a jailbird! A cheap common punk that I took pity on! So that's the way you repay me—ingrate!" Lawson balled his big fists. "Get back to your hole!" he thundered. "Yes, you — Number Six-eight-seven-three-five! And your privileges are revoked!"

If Torri had been a man, he would have planted his feet on the floor and talked back. Maybe that was what Lawson had hoped for. This, after all, was the crucial test. But Torri couldn't measure up to it. His cool agate eyes fell to the floor. His cheek muscles twitched spasmodically. He—cringed.

"Yes, sir," said Spike Torri meekly, and backed out the door.

I came in the room a moment later. Lawson was mopping his brow.

"Boy, that was a close one!" he breathed. "If that fellow had taken a poke at me he could have had Margery and my best wishes. But I knew the guy had a yellow streak in him—I was just hoping to make a man of him in other ways. Well, live and learn."

"You're," I said, "telling me!"

Lawson relaxed. "You're okay, son. Come on, I'll take you on a tour through the place myself. Then we'll have supper together. Help to round out your article—I'm just a family man at heart, and all that stuff. There'll be just Margery, Dr. Avery, and you and me."

I was glad the invitation came from him. If Warden Lamont Lawson, head of the State Penitentiary, had a daughter who gallivanted around with a prison trusty—hell, I wanted to meet the girl and see what made her tick. I had already met Avery—a frank, broad-shouldered young fellow just out of his interneship.

The trip through the prison was interesting enough. Lawson had installed an efficient organization and it worked like a clock. The print shop, mill and foundry ran much like their counterparts on the outside, and the prisoners seemed to have an unusual amount of freedom. The riots, Lawson explained to me, were the result of overcrowding and an insufficient appropriation for food.

"We do the best with the funds at our disposal," he said. "If the people stand for slums and unemployment, we're going to have crime. I'm the fellow that's got to take it in the neck, when that happens. Society's chickens all come home to roost—right here!"

SUPPER that evening was a restrained affair. Lawson and I couldn't help thinking of the two riots —and Spike Torri. Young Dr. Avery was naturally diffident, evidently more so than usual tonight. He stared steadily at Margery Lawson with a sort of hurt, appealing look in his eyes.

Well, I couldn't blame him any—not for looking. Margery, in the popular parlance, was an eyeful. Clear-cut, almost cameolike features, burnished copper hair, and dark blue eyes which seemed troubled, though she said little. When she did speak, she ignored Avery completely. Trying to size her up, I could not for the life of me understand how this girl had fallen for a shallow punk like Torri. Sure, he'd fooled the warden. But you can't fool a woman, brother—they've got intuition!

After the dessert, Margery got up, saying she had a headache, and withdrew to her room with almost tactless haste. Lawson, Avery and I lit our cigars, and Lawson turned on the radio to a dance program.

After a bit: "Margery's a strange child," the warden began awkwardly.

Young Avery's sensitive face twitched. "She is just a child," he

mumbled. "Maybe that's the reason."

I, of course, kept my mouth shut. My ears, too—officially. My article in the Boston *Times* would be concerned strictly with my prison tour. A good newspaperman, after all, prints news—not gossip. What the public doesn't know will never hurt it. Besides—

The dance band abruptly blacked out. We all sat up, tensing. Maybe Hitler had just taken over Greece—

"Flash! Your local newscaster, Benny Bartlett, has just learned that Spike Torri, notorious bank robber, escaped from the State Penitentiary tonight! The eight p. m. checkup revealed Torri missing from his cell. The cell-block is closed by double-doors, and both sets of locks are intact. So is the lock on Torri's own cell!

"Folks, I've got it exclusively that Torri's cellmate claims to have been asleep and to have heard nothing! According to Deputy Warden Herman Wagner—"

Lawson jerked to his feet and switched off the radio.

"That damned local station!" he growled. He grabbed up the French phone from its stand and barked:

"Central 7997! Emergency! Yeah, this is Warden Lawson. . . . Wagner? What the hell is going on? Why did you give out that story? How do you know Torri isn't hiding in the place somewhere? . . . *What!* You *didn't* give it out? You . . . Huh? You called here and my phone didn't answer? Why man, you're crazy—I've been here all evening!"

Avery and I stared at each other.

"Now get this," Lawson barked. "Phone that fool radio station, tell them you found Torri hiding in the prison laundry. . . . Yeah, that's right. Then send a squad out with the bloodhounds. I'll meet you at the 'hollow'—that's where he'll be heading."

Lawson slammed the receiver down and slumped into a chair. His face seemed to have gone pale, and his eyes had a staring look about them.

"Something's screwy around here," he muttered. "Sherman, I've been holding out on you. Funny things have been going on around here lately, but I just couldn't place my finger on what's wrong."

That's me Roy Sherman. "You mean," I said, "something uncanny—"

Lawson got up heavily and put a hand on my shoulder.

"Son," he said, "you came down here for a story. Well, I'm afraid that's just what you're going to get."

CHAPTER II

The Monster Rises

THE three of us emerged into the sweet-scented summer moonlight. A cooling breeze swept in from Cape Cod, a mile away. A manhunt on such a night seemed incongruous. One of the prison guards, running up, met us on the sidewalk.

"The dogs are headed for Richard's Woods, sir," he panted.

Lawson motioned to Avery and me to get into his car, which was parked at the curb, and soon we were speeding over the two-lane highway.

We flushed another guard at the outskirts of the woods, halted.

"The hounds are in there, sir," he reported. "Near the—the—"

He glanced inquiringly in my direction. Lawson nodded his shaggy head.

The man continued, "They're near the 'hollow', Warden." His voice was tinged with awe.

The night seemed suddenly not quite so warm and balmy as we drove on.

"I don't hear any baying," I remarked, with an attempt at calmness.

"Avery cut their vocal cords. Baying would give the chase away. Silent hounds are more terrifying to the pursued," Lawson said.

A cloud passed across the face of the moon, and I shuddered. Black night, heavy thickets shrouding the gaping mist-filled maw of the "hollow," which was a swamplike depression in the woods, and a pack of silent bloodhounds relentless on the trail of a fugitive from justice—I shuddered again.

Lawson stopped the car moments later. About half a dozen guards had gathered, with their electric torches, carbines and sawed-off shotguns. One guard held two straining hounds in leash.

Deputy Warden Wagner lumbered up to report. "The dogs have traced him into that thicket, just as you expected. We then circled it, but there is no trail out. He must be still in there."

"Good!" Lawson snapped. "But keep dogs and men out until daylight. Might fall into the 'hollow' in the dark. Surround the place until morning."

Dr. Avery stayed on, but Warden Lawson and I drove back to town. Before turning in at my hotel, I wired my paper about Torri's escape and told them I was on the track of further news which was about to break. The writing of the prison feature could wait—it was a Sunday article, anyway.

Shortly before daybreak, the warden called for me and drove me out to Richard's Woods again. As soon as it was fully light, we plunged into the thicket from all sides, alert and armed. The bloodhounds led the way straight to the rim of the hollow, where they recoiled with evident terror. I didn't feel much better myself at what I saw.

There was a saffron mist at the bottom of this pit within the hollow. It seemed to be seething with strange activity. Even as we peered down, *the saffron mist gathered itself into a stringy ball and floated upward!*

As the tenuous mass reached the level of the ground, from its evil midst a tentacle suddenly lanced out at Dr. Avery. He threw up his hands before his face, staggered backward from the hollow, tripped and fell. One of the hounds sprang forward protectingly, only to receive the tentacle like a whiplash square across its muzzle.

The next moment the poor animal was writhing on the ground and pawing at the wound—or burn, rather, like that of a branding iron. Avery picked himself up, deftly tied a handkerchief across the dog's muzzle, pinioned its legs with its leash, and—assisted by one of the guards—carried it out gently to the car. There could be no doubt that the dog had been seriously burned.

Meanwhile the nauseous orange-yellow cloud had drifted up, over the tops of the trees, and away out of our sight. The bottom of the hollow now lay exposed to view for the first time, Lawson told me in an aside.

"For the first time?" I asked him. "What is this, a sulphur deposit? Funny that no one seems to have heard anything about it, until now."

"Not at all," Lawson contradicted. "The town here, you know, is quite a summer resort. The prison is far enough on the outskirts not to cause an unpleasant atmosphere. But this hollow here—well, the local people keep quiet about it, so that it won't get into the newspapers. Be bad for the tourist trade, you know. Especially since the prison is located here, too."

WE crowded to the edge of the pit then and peered over its steep sides. The depression was much deeper than we had thought, and in its bottom were tightly packed the yellowed bones of thousands of small birds and

animals. And—lying atop this pile was the skeleton of a man, contorted as though its owner had died in agony; a skeleton literally picked clean of flesh.

"Spike Torri!" Lawson remarked grimly with a sweep of his hand. "He tried his luck just once too often."

Several of the guards, religious fellows, nervously crossed themselves.

No one cared to risk crawling down into the hole to fetch this grisly relic, so ropes and grappling hooks were brought, and the bones were hoisted out.

From Bertillon measurements and the records of the prison dentist, it was unquestionably identified as the last *physical* remains of Spike Torri.

Later, Warden Lawson gave out a statement to the press that Spike Torri had been drowned in a pond in the woods, and that the reason for the earlier official false announcement of Torri's capture was to allay popular fear of a criminal at large. My own account, wired exclusively to the Boston *Times,* was more complete, but it did not mention the hollow and its legend.

Of course, the part about the hollow did eventually leak out in and around the town, and scores of inquisitive persons visited the spot. But by that time the abortive escape of Spike Torri had ceased to be news, and if anything much about the hollow got into the papers I didn't notice it.

Margery Lawson shut herself up in her room, and refused to see anyone, even Dr. Avery. And the young prison physician respected her grief, though he could not respect the cause of it. For it was only too obvious that the girl had fallen for this sleek ex-gangster.

Some subconscious hunch held me in town. I wrote up my Sunday feature article and mailed it in to the *Times.* Yet still I lingered. And, to kill time, I read all the local news.

And all at once I began to notice scattered items about the loss of cows and horses and other stock at various points throughout the county. Always the skeleton would be found, picked clean of flesh. The losses usually occurred at night.

Finally these items came to the attention of others than myself. Wolves were suspected, although none had been seen in this vicinity for a generation. I hired a car and toured the countryside, interviewed farmers (some of whom claimed to have actually seen the wolves), and wrote up a crackerjack of a yarn about it all for my paper.

But Warden Lawson, Dr. Paul Avery and I had our own theory.

One evening when I was visiting at the warden's house, the phone rang. Lawson answered it. I paid no particular attention, until I noticed that he was frantically juggling the center of the phone-rest with one forefinger.

"Operator! Operator!" he barked. "I've been disconnected. Who was calling? All right, ring them back, please. They don't answer? That's strange. Well, keep trying them, and call me."

He replaced the phone in its cradle, then turned toward Avery and me, a strained expression on his face.

"That was Deputy Wagner's voice. He said 'Hello.' Then there was a choking gurgle, and the line went dead. I'm going over across to the prison. Something's wrong."

THE three of us hurried with him across the street. We rang and rang the doorbell at the main entrance, but no one came. We walked around under the wall and shouted up at several of the sentry boxes, but received no response. There were lights in the main office on the second floor, where Deputy Wagner should have been. We

threw stones up against the lighted windows, but without rousing anyone.

Lawson charged back into his own house like a man gone berserk, dialed the headquarters of the local police and the captain of the local National Guard company.

"Jail break!" he snapped. "Rush all available men to the State Penitentiary, and surround the place!"

We had scarcely returned to the street again, when the screaming of motorcycle sirens signaled the arrival of the first detachment of police. These took up positions at strategic points around the gray stone buildings. A half hour later a sleepy company of national guardsmen trotted up. Machine guns were set up opposite the principal exits. Yet still not a sound came from within the prison, to indicate what the mutinous inmates were up to.

Equipped with a powerful long-focus electric flash, Warden Lawson began a tour around the walls.

"You two better keep under cover," he cautioned Avery and me. "The cons are probably armed."

"How about yourself?" I replied.

He laughed harshly. "Wouldn't dare pot *me*." It was the only time I ever heard him boast of his strange power over his charges.

Anyway Avery and I went with him. He trained his beam on the top of the wall and swept it along. It came to a stop on something white. We craned our necks and peered up through the darkness.

The white object was a human skeleton lying atop the wall, with one bony arm trailing down over the edge.

"We might have known," Avery breathed.

Sledgehammers were brought, and two husky policemen battered down the main door. Then, preceded by a squad of soldiers with automatic rifles and pistols alert, we entered the prison. Not a single living soul greeted or opposed us.

In the main office sat another human skeleton, slumped over the desk, with one bony hand resting on the cradle-phone. Every shred of flesh and clothing was gone, except on the head. The head was intact. Dr. Avery lifted it up, and the agonized fat face of Deputy Herman Wagner stared at us, pop-eyed, its jaw fallen open and frozen in that position.

A gasp of horror rose in unison. Then we all raced through the building, searching for what we knew instinctively we would find.

On the bare wires of the bunks in the guards' squad-room lay the skeletons of the day shift—with heads intact.

"Whoever did this was kind enough to leave identification easy," the captain of the soldiers commented grimly.

"Don't!" groaned the warden. "Each of these men was an old friend of mine."

At the entrance to the cell-block we found two seated skeletons. Heads intact, of course. But when we came to the cells, there was a difference; for, in the case of all the prisoners, the skulls too had been picked clean.

Sickened to our souls, we turned away. Warden Lawson, walking like a man in a dream, his eyes distant and vacant, extinguished all the lights, locked all the inside doors, and requisitioned a squad of soldiers to guard the battered entrance until morning.

Paul Avery edged up to me, his normally luminous brown eyes now slits, and whispered,

"The mist has fed well this night."

His words snapped me out of my horrified daze. Bidding the distracted warden a "good evening" which he scarcely noticed, I raced back to my hotel and phoned my city editor the scoop of the year.

I HAD just hung up, when the operator rang me back.

"Paul Avery speaking. Come over as quickly as you can. Mr. Lawson is taking this situation too hard, and Margery and I can't handle him."

I hopped a taxi and sped to the warden's home. Margery and Dr. Avery, with solemn faces and fingers entwined, met me at the door and ushered me into the den.

There sat Margery's father, his big body slumped in a chair, his bushy mane of hair rumpled, his leonine head in his strong hands.

"It's all my fault," he kept moaning in a monotone. "All my fault."

And nothing that the three of us said could snap him out of his stupor of remorse.

CHAPTER III

Abortive Attack

THE next few days were hectic ones for me. The inquest at the prison was front-page stuff. Staff writers from all the leading dailies in the country flew in, but I still maintained the inside news track.

The town was jammed with curiosity-seekers, who even dared to invade the depths of the hollow and cart away its grisly contents, bone by bone. Hawkers appeared on the streets, selling miniature skeletons and little bottles filled with orange-yellow gas. It was the Lindbergh kidnap trial all over again, and worse.

Through it all Warden Lawson moved like a sleep-walker, but whether stunned into mental numbness or lost in unfathomable thoughts, we three who watched over him were unable to determine.

Together so constantly, Margery and Paul Avery became very close friends. They became so close, in fact, that one afternoon they slipped down to the church rectory and were married quietly by the minister.

Quiet, too, was the mist. The orange-yellow menace had not been sighted since its violent and all-embracing attack on the prison.

"It's sleeping off its orgy in some hideout," Avery suggested somberly. "This thing is a horrible monstrosity, and I wish the public would realize it and do something about it."

That was the strange part of it all. First news of the prison outrage had created a sensation. "The mist" had been played up in 96-point headlines. And then editors had begun to get cynical.

"Such a monster is beyond the realm of possibility," they snorted. "What probably happened is that the ventilation system, which runs through the prison's chemical laboratory, became choked with a powerful gas which eats away flesh and then dissipates itself in the air. Probably some convict was experimenting with a highly volatile form of mustard gas, and something went wrong."

I made my own investigation. I checked over every chemical in the place. I examined the records of chemicals bought for the past year by the prison's purchasing officer.

And there were insufficient chemicals, or combinations of them, to have compounded such wholesale death!

Being a newspaperman, I kept my discoveries to myself. Now was not the proper time to go off half-cocked on a wild-eyed tangent. I would have to wait and let things take their course. Of that much I was certain—the mist, whenever it was ready, would strike again.

Meanwhile, a meeting of minds could be of no harm. Margery, Paul Avery

and I had numerous discussions on the nature of the mist. Leading scientists throughout the world wrote glib articles explaining the phenomenon as one sort of caustic gas or another; but somehow their explanations didn't sound very convincing.

For one thing, they all ducked what seemed to me to be the most significant fact of all, namely, that the heads of *all* the prisoners had been left fleshless, while the guards had kept their skulls intact. I felt that this was somehow the key to the whole morbid puzzle. Obviously the mist did things by calculation; obviously there was diabolical method in its madness. . . .

Gradually the furor died down. Warden Lawson ceased to be a personality of news interest. Indeed, he ceased to have any individuality at all. He simply sat through the days with head bowed in his hands, as in a constant daze.

The newspapers had forgotten all about the affair at the State Penitentiary when the mist struck again. One morning a badly frightened farmer living on the outskirts of town phoned in to report that the whole of the adjoining farm was blotted out by yellow fog.

I WAS now representing a chain of papers, in addition to the Boston *Times*. I hastened to the scene by taxi, snapped shot after shot of the huge gaseous amoeba, and sent the films off by twin carrier pigeons. Our cameras take all pictures in duplicate, and it was well this time that they did. For as my two birds circled up after being released from their cage, a yellow tentacle lanced out, flicked one of them and dragged it back fluttering into the writhing mist. The other pigeon, with a terrified upsurge, escaped.

Shortly thereafter, crowds of morbid sightseers began to arrive. But now the holiday spirit, which had been evident during the inquest, was markedly absent. The present onlookers were intent and grim.

A stiff wind was blowing toward the mist from one side, but that did not seem to affect it other than to ruffle its pulsating surface. Someone suggested fighting it with fire, and instantly the crowd went determinedly to work piling up hay and fence rails along the boundary. Soon hot tongues of fire were lapping out at the tendrils of yellow mist.

The mist cringed back at the contact, and the throng let out a yell of triumph. The mist gave way, retreated, then surged aloft in a compact saffron ball, clear of the flames, to reveal for the first time the condition of the farm which it had invaded.

With the exception of *one small shed, surmounted by a radio aerial*—radio had been Farmer Johnson's hobby—not a building remained standing. There was not a tree, shrub, plant or even a blade of grass left on the entire farm. Alongside what had once been the barn, there lay now the bleached skeletons of two cows.

I got some excellent pictures, and released two more pigeons.

When the borderline fires died down, the ball of yellow fog descended again. Once more it spread out over the entire farm, licking out misty tentacles at the crowd until the people stampeded back to a safe distance. Then the mist relapsed into quiescence.

Later in the day, so I learned, the village fire department, called to extinguish a grass fire which had spread with a change in the wind, tried squirting both water and chemicals at the mist, but without any evident result.

That evening at the Lawsons', during a lull in the conversation, I was idly twiddling the dials of the radio set

when the following message suddenly blared forth. I can give it verbatim, inasmuch as it was later reprinted in all the newspapers.

We, the Mist, address the people of this State. We wish to live at peace with you. Do not attack us again with fire. Not that fire can hurt us, for you have seen that it cannot. But attacks on us irritate our patience. Do not try it again.

As we said, we wish to live at peace with the world. Feed us two fat steers per day, and we will remain within the confines of the Johnson farm. Refuse us this very reasonable request, and we shall go on a rampage.

No telling then where we shall strike. No citizen will be safe. You have already seen an example of our power in our raid on the State Penitentiary. We await an official reply on our own wave-length: fifteen-point-three.

SILENCE then. A creepy feeling ran down my spine.

"What the hell is this?" I muttered. "I don't get it. I don't get it at all."

Margery said, "I don't see how it could use the radio."

That's what got me sweating. "I've heard of screwy things, but never of a mist making up to a microphone."

Avery pursed his lips and said, "I think I've heard that voice before."

An expression of reminiscence and of pain flashed across Margery's face. Her jaw set and her blue eyes narrowed.

"That was Spike Torri's voice," she said. "I could never forget it."

"But Torri is dead!" I exclaimed. "The Mist got him." (I didn't realize it then, but the Thing had assumed the proportions of a monster from that point on in my mind. It was a living Thing now—*the Mist*.)

Paul Avery looked at me. "I wonder," he said. "I wonder if he is dead."

That brought Warden Lawson out of his daze. The whole of his face lighted up, and his bushy black brows twitched. He tensed his lips, snapped his fingers several times, nodded his head *contentedly*—and then lapsed back into quiescence.

All that evening we hung by the radio, waiting for an official reply from the State capital. But Governor Maverick, a shrewd politician, merely called in the press and issued a statement that he had begun an immediate investigation. He would, he said, have some definite news within twenty-four hours.

That gave me an idea. I phoned the State House and got the Governor's assistant secretary on the wire. He and I had been roommates at college.

"Joe," I said, "what's the payoff?"

His voice got very low. "For cripes' sake, don't let it get out that this came from me. Phone Professor Mordecai Miller at Harvard—you know, the world's leading authority on chemical poison. Tell him that you figure he's been called into the case—because who else would know what to do? So naturally he'll say 'yes,' that the Governor just got in touch with him."

"Thanks, pal," I said. "Call this number"—I gave him the listing—"if anything else breaks, huh? I won't be here, but leave word for me to call back."

So I phoned Professor Miller and got him just as he was about to leave on a chartered plane.

"Naturally I have been summoned by the Governor," he snapped. "Who else would be called in?"

Didn't like himself much, did he? I got my paper three minutes later. We broke the news of Miller's imminent arrival hours ahead of any other sheet in the country.

Next morning I went out to the Johnson farm. Miller had been there for a couple hours and had been working since before dawn, supervising the as-

sembling of several trunkloads of laboratory apparatus. Although it was seven o'clock, a huge crowd had already gathered. Paul Avery had come with me, but he had insisted that Margery remain at home.

The local militia company was there, too, with a lot of peculiar-looking gadgets like fire extinguishers. And a dozen or more oil trucks.

Avery and I introduced ourselves to Professor Miller, a tall, lean, scholarly gentleman with a brown Vandyke beard and an expression of intense intolerance.

Avery started to tell him that the Mist was a living creature, possessed of a high degree of intelligence, and to be fought as such. But the Professor brushed him impatiently aside with a contemptuous, "What degrees do you hold, Dr. Avery?" and continued about his business.

OIL from the trucks was sprayed into the Mist from all sides. The Mist merely parted to let the streams through, then closed again like a trap when the streams petered out. Professor Miller's white teeth grinned with satisfaction through his brown beard.

The troops, with their engines of war at equal intervals, now surrounded the Johnson farm. Three shots from a revolver by their captain was the signal for them to get into action. Scores of flames belched in unison from their flame-throwers.

With a mighty hiss, the Mist recoiled inwardly from all sides. And the fuel oil, previously sprayed in and now uncovered, blazed up with a roar. The Mist had been trapped, taken by surprise. It contracted into a compact orange-colored ball in the very center of the farm, as the fire surged toward it.

Then with an upcurving wave along its entire periphery, the Mist sprang outward in all directions. A saffron tidal wave, it came. It blanketed the flames. Angry tentacles, like flames themselves, lanced out at the surrounding crowd, which scattered stumblingly with shrieks of terror.

When it was all over, and the Mist had withdrawn again to the proper confines of the Johnson farm, the flames had been blotted out, and the place was ringed with a row of human skeletons, all but one of which had its head still intact. That one exception was the skeleton of the late Professor Mordecai Miller of Harvard; *his* skull was eaten clean.

CHAPTER IV

Appeasement

ON our silent return to town, Margery Avery met us at the door with a long face and tears in her blue eyes.

"Father's gone," she announced.

"Gone? What do you mean, gone?" I demanded.

"I mean exactly that. Gone, skipped, fled! The Governor phoned demanding father's resignation as warden. Instead of replying, he just merely kissed me good-by, and left."

She flashed a glance at her husband, and he added, "For some time I have thought his mind affected."

I stared first into Avery's clear-eyed virile face, then into Margery's smoothly chiseled features. Something was wrong here. Their reaction wasn't what one would expect under the circumstances. I sensed this, although I couldn't quite put my finger on it. But then, when do human beings ever react exactly as we expect them to?

I dashed into the house and made for the telephone, then hesitated.

"Go ahead and call the *Times*," said Margery. "We don't mind."

I stared at her for a moment, then shrugged my shoulders, and put in a call for Boston, collect.

While I was talking to the City Desk, Margery and Avery tuned in on short-wave station 15.3, the Mist's "official" wave-length. As I hung up, they got the following:

We, the Mist, speaking. Now that we have added the mind of Professor Miller to our already composite mentality, we now know more about our own gaseous composition than the rest of the world will ever know. We are invulnerable. Why try to make war upon us, when all we wish is to live at peace with our neighbors?

If you refuse to make peace, then it is you who have become the aggressors, and we shall be reluctantly compelled to retaliate with whatever weapons are at our command. We can match frightfulness with frightfulness, if that be what the world wishes.

But, if our extremely reasonable terms are met, we shall take over no more territory. We, the Mist, have spoken.

Paul Avery squared his broad shoulders. "Well," he announced, "this confirms what I have suspected for some time. For years the Mist led a low state of almost vegetative existence in the bottom of the Richard's Woods hollow, feeding on plant life and on the bodies and minds of small animals and birds and insects. Then, by accident, Spike Torri stumbled into its maw.

"Now, at last, the Mist possessed a human mind, the most brilliant though depraved brain in American gangsterdom. Led by this distorted mentality, this Thing swept out of its hollow, attacked the State Penitentiary and absorbed the minds of all the other criminals there.

"But it was careful not to absorb the minds of any of those who were on the side of law and order; hence the untouched heads of Deputy Wagner and the prison guards. Professor Miller is just screwy enough that the Mist is willing to take a chance on adding him, too."

"Well," said Margery, with a touch of sarcasm in her voice, "now that we know all about it, what are we going to do?"

SHE amazed me! So calm and unaffected by this revelation that her former lover had become an amoeboid vampire, a menace to mankind! But, then, I never could quite understand this girl.

Avery answered, "We *don't* know everything. We know merely the composition of its mind. Before a successful attack can be made upon it, we must learn the nature of its body."

Thereafter the press was filled with scientific speculation as to what the Mist was, how it was able to "broadcast," whether it had a voice and knew how to speak over a microphone, or whether by its very nature it could set radio waves in motion.

A few days later Paul Avery moved his own laboratory apparatus over from the now vacant penitentiary to a room in the Lawson house, and set to work to try to devise some sort of gadget for taking a sample of the Mist.

"For," as he declared, "we obviously cannot learn its real nature unless and until we analyze it."

"And even then," I said, "I wonder. What would a chemical analysis of the human body teach us of human powers and capabilities?"

Avery merely shrugged his broad shoulders. "We can but try."

To assist him with his work, he hired a gross repulsive person, introduced to me merely as "Old Tom." Scalp close-clipped. Face clean-shaven. No eyebrows or eyelashes. Lips pendulous and drooling.

I took an instant dislike to the fellow. He gave me the creeps. There was something elusively familiar about

him, which just escaped me. Avery said that Old Tom was an ex-convict who had formerly assisted him in the prison laboratory, and that I had probably met Old Tom in my tour of the place. He had been released, his term completed, just in time to escape being devoured by the Mist.

But this explanation did not satisfy me. A newspaper reporter learns to sense when facts are being withheld from him. And furthermore, I had the uncanny feeling that Old Tom's gimlet eyes were fixed upon me whenever I turned my back.

I told Avery that I objected to his having a jailbird in his employ.

"Who knows but what he's in cahoots with Spike Torri?" I added.

Avery replied, "I need Old Tom in more ways than one. Not only can he help me in my laboratory work, but he can also keep us in touch with the underworld. *You* will appreciate that—later." Nor would he tell me what he meant by that last crack.

Margery sided with her husband, and so Old Tom stayed on. He must have known of my objections, and that they had been overruled, for now his fat face seemed always to bear a leer of triumph.

Curiously enough, New York's underworld chose that very week to line up behind a new leader. Crime news reporters described him glowingly as a veritable master mind; a big, heavy-set man with a dominating personality.

One evening I found Paul Avery reading the papers. He looked up at me calmly, his finger pointing to the front-page account of New York's latest big shot.

"I told you his mind was affected," he said.

"What do you mean?" I demanded.

"Get on to yourself, Roy. That's Margery's father, and he's turned criminal in a big way."

I looked at him as though he were insane.

"You're nuts! I never heard of anything so screwy in my life."

Avery regarded me quizzically. "Wait and see," he said. "Wait and see."

THE State made one more attempt to destroy the Mist. One of the largest bombing planes available was borrowed from Mitchel Field on Long Island, to try to blast out the yellow fog that squatted low on the Johnson farm. The press, but not the populace, had been tipped off in advance, and so I was there on the sidelines at the impromptu press gallery.

The Mist was unusually quiet that day, as the plane flew low above it on a reconnaissance flight. But it seemed to me that there was a tenseness and alertness to its quietude. From constant observation, I believed that I had learned to sense its *moods*.

After circling the farm once, the bomber flew straight across and loosed one two-thousand-pound bomb in the very center of the farm. A geyser of yellow gas, streaked with black dirt, spouted upward from the impact of the projectile; then bent suddenly in the direction of the departing ship. It lanced out with one rope-like tentacle, seized the luckless plane and yanked it down like a lassoed steer. Eager yellow fingers reached up from the surface of the Mist to meet the ship as it fell.

A moment later the Mist divided, leaving a narrow swath extending straight from the sidelines to the wreck of the plane. As we stared fascinated, yellow tentacles sprouted from each side-wall of the fog, reached into the cockpit and hauled out the struggling pilot. Holding the man suspended just off the ground, by one tentacle wrapped tightly around his neck, the Mist ex-

tended other tentacles and stripped the flesh from his writhing bones.

Horrified, unable to help, I shuddered and turned my face away from the grisly scene. A gasping sigh in unison escaped the crowd of newshawks. I opened my eyes and turned back. The Mist had closed in again, and was quiescent.

But as we gaped at its blank wall of yellow, it parted once more, disclosing a crater of dirt where the radio shed had stood. Then rising from the ground, the Mist formed itself into letters of smoke, like those of a sky-writer:

"REBUILD!"

"Why should we rebuild?" someone shouted from the crowd.

The sky-writing oozed together again, and then reformed as:

"OR ELSE!"

We all broke, raced our cars to the nearest phones, and relayed this latest warning to our respective papers.

The reaction by the State authorities was immediate. Complete short-wave sending and receiving apparatus was rushed to the Johnson farm, and a courageous young radio engineer (under promise of ten thousand dollars anyway, and a substantial pension for his family if he should never return) entered a rift in the Mist, and rebuilt the station. The Mist permitted him to go and come without interference, as he brought in load after load of necessary materials. He was on the job for nearly a week.

From his reports, the public learned at last how the Mist, although possessing no voice as such, had been able to broadcast. For the Mist resumed communication with the world before the young engineer had rebuilt the radio shed's microphone. Thus it demonstrated only too graphically that in some manner, it had the power to set up an electrical disturbance in the tubes, capacities or inductances of the Johnson short-wave set.*

FINALLY the young radioman shouted, "One more trip, and it will be finished." He emerged from the cleft which stretched from the newly built shed to the edge of the farm. Then he shouted back:

"I fooled you, Mist. The radio set is complete and in working order; and I have escaped you!"

The cleft closed together with a snap, and from the already tuned loudspeakers set up in the press gallery, there intoned the voice of Spike Torri:

"That act of bravado was unnecessary. If he had trusted us, what is about to happen would not take place."

The voice sounded quite annoyed, it seemed to me. And that night the young electrician, his wife and their baby daughter died horribly in their beds, stripped of all their flesh—except the heads.

This latest outrage convinced the State authorities that no one was safe. So Governor Maverick promptly entered into an agreement with the Mist, whereby the Mist was to keep within the confines of its present territory, and was to be fed cattle at State expense, as long as it did so.

CHAPTER V

The Antidote

THE events of the next few weeks can be summarized in brief. There

* In order for the mist to produce any sort of reaction in the Johnson short-wave set, it must have been capable of generating electrical impulses, perhaps similar to static. We might assume that the mist had the same power to produce positive electricity as clouds do, and thus cause lightning by attracting ground charges to it. Possibly the intelligence of the cloud was able to formulate static noises into recognizable words.—Ed.

capped by an hermetic shutter, which could be opened or closed at will by an electric impulse sent along a pair of long wires, which also served as a tow-rope for the bottle.

With a vacuum pump Avery exhausted the air from the bottle, and then sealed it. All was in readiness.

I drove him out to the Mist in the car I'd bought. At his command, I turned the car around facing toward town again, and sat at the wheel with motor running. Avery approached the wall of yellow smoke.

Swinging the bottle round and round his head by its wire rope, he let go and launched it far into the midst of the Mist. Click! Click! He pressed two electric buttons in quick succession. Then he hauled in on the cable, hand over hand for dear life.

That portion of the Mist nearby seethed in angry confusion; then reared up over us, with pawlike knobs projecting from its upper edge, like a panther preparing to pounce.

Clutching his precious bottle close to his chest, Avery raced to the car and plunged in beside me. We were off and away. And after us, like a swirling tornado, roared the Mist.

It had taken the Mist several seconds to gather itself together after that first abortive pounce, and so we got several hundred yards head start. But now, although we were tearing along over the concrete at not less than eighty-five, the yellow smoke-cloud slowly and steadily gained upon us.

"We aren't going to make it!" Avery groaned, glancing back as I drove the car across the Simpson's Creek bridge and entered town.

I glanced back too, just in time to see the Mist halt abruptly at the edge of the creek, and rear up into the air like a cowboy's horse reined suddenly back onto its haunches. Then it veered to the westward, upstream.

I slowed down just in time to avoid running into an interstate bus.

We reached the cottage without further pursuit. Neither Margery nor Old Tom were anywhere about, but at the moment we had forgotten them.

Avery and I went at once to his laboratory. He was pale and shaking like a leaf, not so much because of the yellow death from which we had just escaped, as from the fear that his quest would prove fruitless.

With trembling hands, he sucked the contents of the steel bottle into a vacuumized glass container. Then he sank into a chair from sheer relief. For the vacuum container was now filled with seething yellow gas! The daring attempt had not failed.

Margery came in carrying a pail; and in response to her husband's frantic query as to where she had been, she explained that she had gone down to the rocks to get some sea water for her aquarium, Margery's greatest hobby.

Avery proudly showed her his capture. "Now to analyze it," he announced.

The sample of mist was now boiling more violently. As we clustered about it, it burst its prison asunder with a clatter of broken glass, hung above our heads for a moment, then fled and cowered in one corner of the room.

"Don't let it escape!" Avery cried in frantic tones.

I SLAMMED the door, and he pulled down and latched the only window. Ripping off her blouse, Margery stuffed it under the door and into the keyhole.

"We've got you, Mr. Mist!" Paul Avery exclaimed in triumph.

But his joy was short-lived. The ball of gas swelled to twice its size. Tentacles trickled out in all directions from its base. And then this synthetic

was a sameness in their ominous monotony. Time after time the Mist oozed out of its agreed boundaries and occupied additional adjoining farms. Each time a new arrangement was solemnly agreed to, promising the Mist a larger daily supply of steers, in return for its solemn agreement now at last to stay put.

A special railroad branch was built up to the edge of the Mist, to accommodate the daily cattle train. The town boomed as never before from the thousands upon thousands of tourists who converged from all over the continent to see this freak of nature. A large semicircular grandstand was built along one boundary of Mistland.

Yet, with each disregard of former commitments by the Mist, with each further extension of fog-enshrouded territory, there were popular rumblings. There was increased insistence by a growing faction of public opinion, that some day this policy of appeasement would have to come to an end, that some day America would have to fight the Mist to a showdown, or become completely its slave.

Meanwhile the State Penitentiary had been reopened, and Paul and Margery Avery had been ousted from their State-owned home to make room for the new warden. My two young friends moved to a cottage, on a small island in the bay close to the mainland, and I moved in to live with them. Old Tom was there too, of course, helping Avery in his laboratory and doing odd jobs around the place, though he frequently was absent for several days at a time, on "business of his own." The nature of this business was not confided to me.

I saw very little of Avery and Margery, so busy was I on my reportorial work. I could sense that the two of them walked in the shadow of a great fear, and so were not very communicative. Avery did not go near the Mist, but built device after device in his laboratory, only to discard them all.

"I want to be sure in advance that it will work," he explained to me. "For I feel certain that our enemy will give me only one chance, and I can't afford to fail."

Meanwhile, New York's new Public Enemy Number 1 was doing all right by himself. He held up an armored car down on Wall Street, a feat heretofore considered well-nigh impossible, in view of the way the financial sector is policed. He organized a new restaurant racket, and the District Attorney's office nearly went crazy trying to get frightened restaurant owners to sign complaints.

So fantastic became his exploits, in fact, that he literally crowded the Mist off the front page. My paper was about to recall me to Boston, because the quiescent activities of the Mist no longer rated a staff correspondent.

But now I found, dropped right into my lap, a new source of copy. Old Tom, by virtue of his previous gangland connections, was able to give me tips about the activities of this new Public Enemy Number 1 well in advance of the stories breaking in the press. And so I stayed on.

But the Mist, jealous at being elbowed out of the limelight, demanded that my stories be suppressed. The Governor ordered me to stop. I claimed my constitutional right of "freedom of the press," and certain elements promptly threatened to run me out of the State.

"Pipe down!" Avery advised me, "I'm ready to give you some *real* news."

He led me into his laboratory, and showed me what he had devised.

IT was a strong steel bottle lined with shatterproof glass. Its mouth was

octopus began to crawl slowly forward.

Margery's blue eyes went wide, she clenched her two hands in front of her face and shrieked. The creature sprang upon her and stifled her screams, with one rope-like arm wrapped round and round her smooth young throat.

Avery glanced frantically about for some weapon, saw the pail of sea water, snatched it up and hurled its contents squarely at Margery and the beast.

And there was no longer any beast there! Not a trace of mist remained!

Margery sank dripping to the floor, and began to sob convulsively. But even as he sprang to comfort her in his strong arms, Paul Avery's brown eyes glowed with triumph.

"Margery, dear," he soothed. "Believe me, we've got it licked! We know the antidote. Salt water will destroy the Mist! The Mist doesn't even dare to pass over an arm of the sea. It tried to follow me home, but recoiled when we crossed Simpson's Creek. We are safe from it here on this island."

Margery stopped her sobbing, and smiled up at her husband with shining eyes.

A darkness suddenly enshrouded the room. I flashed a glance at the window. A thick yellow fog had engulfed the house. Wisps of yellow haze were beginning to seep in around the window.

Avery and Margery immediately sensed the situation.

"Salt!" Avery cried.

But I wondered. The Mist had got up sufficient courage to cross the channel between our island and the shore. Was it no longer allergic to salt?

"In the kitchen!" Margery answered. "There's a bag of salt in the cabinet."

She tore open the door, then recoiled in the face of the dense yellow fog gathered in the hallway.

Avery remembered a cup of salt on one of the laboratory shelves. As tenuous tentacles reached in through the doorway to seize his wife, he hurled a handful of salt past her. The Mist retreated precipitately. Avery followed it with cup in hand, drove it from the house with pinches of salt, as Margery rushed for the kitchen and snatched up the precious bag of white ammunition from the kitchen cabinet.

Then before the Mist could return, we closed all the doors and windows. Next we mixed up a salt solution in tubs and pails and bowls, emptied out all the fire extinguishers and filled them with salt water, and packed all the door and window cracks with salt-soaked cloths. We were now prepared to withstand a siege.

"That's all very well," I objected, as we paused panting from our labors, "but unfortunately the Mist can eat wood. You saw how it destroyed the buildings on the Johnson farm. Undoubtedly it is gnawing through your roof right now."

To my surprise, Avery chuckled. "I'm going to phone the fireboat, give the Mist a real load of antidote."

BUT he couldn't raise "central." Gradually the realization dawned on us that, somehow, the Mist had cut the telephone wires. We afterward discovered that this had been very simply accomplished by eating away the insulation, thus permitting a short-circuit between the two twisted cords.

"Well," Avery declared, "I'll have to go for help."

We begged him not to, but he insisted. I offered to go instead; but, when I realized that the only way to keep clear of the Mist would be to *swim* clear to town, and when I took a good look at Avery's broad shoulders, I piped down.

So Avery stripped himself and

smeared his body with salt. Then, fire extinguisher in hand, he flung open the front door. The circumambient Mist recoiled, as Avery raised his weapon menacingly. Then he dashed out, and the yellow fog closed over him. We heard a splash.

Craning our ears, we fancied that we could hear a rhythmic ripple, as of a swimmer, growing gradually fainter, but we couldn't be sure—it might have been merely the waves on the rocks. At last silence. The Mist surged in at us again, and we slammed the door in its face. Once more we packed the cracks, and waited. Waited.

But we did not sit and wait. Extinguishers in hand, we patrolled the house. Holes began to appear in the inside walls; but we drove back, with squirts of saline solution, the yellow fog which filtered in.

Faster and faster we had to work, as more and more holes appeared. Finally we retreated to the laboratory, barricaded the door and waited.

Holes appeared in the door and walls. Frantically we fought. Our lungs became raw with exertion. At last we had to quit. Not only were we too tired to struggle any further, but our last supply of salt water was exhausted. Margery crept into my arms and whimpered, as we awaited the inevitable end.

But the intruding jets of yellow vapor ceased their infiltration. Withdrew, even. It became lighter out.

"Look, Margery!" I cried, dragging her to the window.

All around us the Mist was rising. It was drifting away. I could make out the lines of the shore; the bulk of a boat.

It was the town fireboat, all its streams of salt water playing upon our little island. We were saved!

Margery and I rushed out of the house to greet Avery, as the fireboat docked and he sprang ashore. Soon the young couple were in each other's arms.

Far overhead hung an angry churning ball of yellow smoke, which finally shot off to the northwestward in the direction of the Johnson farm. The Averys' cottage looked as though it had been through the mill, but its burns were not too many to be patched up.

I went immediately ashore to phone the story to my paper, and soon the State was buzzing with plans for a concerted attack on the Mist with fire engines and salt water.

CHAPTER VI

The Trick

THE Mist promptly put a stop to these plans. That night the Thing went on a violent rampage. When morning dawned, the death toll of men, women and children, far and wide, mounted to over a thousand! The Mist must have divided itself into hundreds of separate units, in order to accomplish such a carnage.

Then came its broadcast ultimatum to the Governor:

> We, the Mist, insist that you give a definite promise that there shall be no more attacks upon us. And no more encirclement. We are to be free to expand as and where we see fit. Cattle are to be furnished to us, adequate to our needs.
>
> That part of our mind which was the mind of Professor Miller has devised a defense against salt water, so Dr. Avery's discovery has been in vain.
>
> But as indemnity for his attack upon us, we demand that his wife Margery be delivered up to us with the next load of cattle. That part of us which was Spike Torri desires to blend his soul with hers.
>
> Refuse our demands, and there will be another shambles. We, the Mist, have spoken.

Governor Maverick immediately acceded to all of these demands, except

one. To the honor of his memory, be it said that he refused to deliver up Margery Avery, declaring that he would not send one innocent human victim to death, regardless of what reprisals might follow such refusal.

That night the Governor died in his bed, a skeleton stripped except as to the head.

We rushed Margery to a cell in the penitentiary and organized a squad of guards equipped with fire extinguishers loaded with salt water. Margery was let alone.

"All of which proves," I announced the next day through my paper, "that the Mist's claim that its absorbed Professor Miller has discovered an antidote for salt water, its mortal enemy, is sheer nonsense."

Throughout the country, the citizenry began to arm themselves with salt-water defenses. And as if this were not turmoil enough, gangland, undoubtedly led by ex-Warden Lamont Lawson, struck simultaneously and effected an epochal haul of banks and jewelry stores.

The reaction of the Mist to the arming of America was surprisingly conciliatory. Over the air, it announced that for the present, it would refrain from further reprisals, if the U. S. Government would capture and deliver up to it Public Enemy No. 1—the man whose identity only Avery and I knew about. Incredible or not, I had to admit that the second-hand description of New York's new criminal master mind could only point to one man.

The Mist concluded:

For we need this criminal's brain to add to our already superhuman mind. The State can kill two birds with one stone by delivering him up: rid yourselves of a notorious gangster, and comply with our demands. I might add that this criminal genius was once known in this region as Lamont Lawson, warden of the State Penitentiary.

TO say I was startled would put it mildly. The secret which Avery and I had so closely guarded was now common public property. How would poor Margery take it?

Margery took it altogether too well. When I tried to soothe her, she became distant, almost impolite. I was so shocked, words failed me altogether.

At any rate, the Mist's suggestion captivated the public imagination, and soon the President, the Governors of most of the States, the Mayors of many cities, and even public-spirited private citizens were offering a rapidly snowballing reward for the capture of Lamont Lawson, dead or alive.

I came unexpectedly upon Margery Avery and Old Tom discussing the situation. What I heard was incredible.

"I've a mind to go after that reward. It's stupendous!" Old Tom was saying. "I am an old man, and those millions will mean a lot to those whom I love. Also think of the service to my country!"

"Oh, you dear, dear man," Margery cried, flinging her arms around the repulsive creature and kissing him full on the mouth.

They hadn't noticed me. I turned and staggered from the scene, my arm across my eyes. Margery Avery, conspiring to betray her father into a living death! I would have thrashed any man who breathed that such a thing was possible.

And now, how to warn Paul Avery without smearing Margery? This problem was still unsolved when a few days later, on my return from a jaunt to town, Avery, his large brown eyes shining, his broad young shoulders resolutely squared, beckoned me into his laboratory and pointed dramatically to an object on the floor. *It was Lamont Lawson, bound and gagged!*

"Now for the reward, and to save the

world," he declaimed.

I recoiled in horror. "You too?" I cried.

"Certainly. We planned it that way."

"You planned it that way!" I was absolutely thunderstruck.

"Yep—Mr. Lawson, Margery and I. We had you fooled all the while. Please forgive us. But there was too much at stake to trust even you."

Margery joined us. Avery stepped over to the bound figure and snatched off its black wig and glued-on eyebrows.

Before me now lay—Old Tom!

"Oh, so it isn't Mr. Lawson! It's only Old Tom!" I exclaimed in relief. "Serves the fellow right for his treachery."

Avery removed the gag and helped the bound figure to sit up. From it came the familiar booming voice of ex-Warden Lamont Lawson.

"Treachery, my hat! Never went away, except for excursions into gangland. Merely shaved my head. Posed as Old Tom. Never was any Old Tom except me."

"But why give yourself up to the Mist?" I remonstrated. "Surely this young couple would rather have you than all the rewards in the world."

"You know we would, Dad," Margery breathed. There were tears in her blue eyes.

"Yes, I know, child," he replied, looking up at her. "But I've made up my mind. There's no turning aside now."

There came a knock at the front door. As Margery went to answer it, Paul Avery hastily replaced the wig, eyebrows and gag on Mr. Lawson. Then the police entered and carted him away. We never saw him again.

I COULD not speak for a full minute. Finally I got a grip on myself.

"Paul," I exclaimed, "for God's sake, let me in on this before I go nuts. It—it just doesn't make sense!"

He came over and put a soothing hand on my shoulder.

"Take it easy, old man. There really isn't such a great mystery to it. You see, the warden felt that Torri's death at the hands of the Mist was his own responsibility. He brooded over it for days. Then, that night when it made its first broadcast, Lawson knew that Spike Torri, whose voice the Mist was using, had been absorbed by the monster.

"That woke him up from his despondency. He realized, then, that the only way that he could come into contact with the Mist, was to so build himself up as a gang leader that the Mist would want to absorb him for his criminal mentality."

Margery broke in, "That's it exactly. You see, through his position as warden, Dad knew just what criminals to contact in New York. So he bought some padded-out clothes, shaved his head and eyebrows, and got some false hair and a pair of brows. You see, he didn't want to look too much like himself.

"When he was in New York, he used the fake makeup, which made him resemble his real self. When he showed up here as Old Tom, his nostrils and cheeks were distorted with putty, his face was smeared with dirt, he wore dirty old clothes and he removed his false makeup."

I was so stunned by the whole trick, as well as by the sickening certainty of the final outcome, that I couldn't say another word. I went up to my room, locked the door and for long hours sat at the open window, gazing out over the rocks and the sea.

CHAPTER VII

The Devil Disappears

GANGLAND, of course, raised hell. Deprived of the best brain ever to

come their way, they were like a flock of sheep without a leader. They actually became so brazen as to send unsigned telegrams to the new Governor, demanding Lamont Lawson's release. They threatened to charter a plane and bomb the State capital to smithereens.

Caught between two fires, the authorities were nevertheless more afraid of the Mist than of the combined forces of gangdom. A double guard was placed around the State Penitentiary, and no rescue was effected or even attempted.

Knowing the Mist as we did, we fully expected it would decide to stand for no delay, but would invade the prison in search of its victim. Yet we miscalculated the Mist's colossal ego.

Everything, the Mist stated, must come off according to Hoyle. Lamont Lawson would have to be turned over to the Thing after an appropriate official ceremony on the Johnson farm!

That was too much for me. I got the City Desk on the phone.

"Dan, this is Sherman. Listen—send me out a relief on this Mist business, will you? Honest, I can't take it any more. I can't stand to see Lawson being swallowed up like that . . ."

There was an awkward silence. Then I heard, "You can have a month's vacation, Roy. After that crazy ceremony. But you knew Lawson, you admired him, and you're the man who's got to cover his last bow. Write anything you like—we'll print it."

So it finally came off, two days later. Paul and Margery Avery went out alone to sit on the rocks, their hands clasped tightly together. The reaction had set in now. They realized they had been party to a magnificent sacrifice—and a ghastly tragedy. They sat there now, silent, tears streaming down their cheeks . . .

I took the little launch to the mainland. Then I got my car out of the garage and drove to the Johnson farm.

There was a tremendous crowd gathered on the sidelines. Yet not a soul might have been there, so silent was every throat.

Promptly at ten o'clock an official limousine drew up. Out of it stepped Governor Maverick's successor and Lamont Lawson, in the custody of two prison guards. The little party proceeded amid packed silence to a little bandstand built for the occasion. The Governor took a last look at Lawson, standing there perfectly calm, an unfathomable smile on his face, and shuddered. Then he approached a microphone.

From my place in the press gallery I craned my neck forward, fascinated, sickened, incredulous.

The Governor raised his voice. "Mist, we are ready!"

The saffron, nebulous monster divided itself in a narrow cleft, whose opening was directly in front of the Governor's stand. While everyone strained forward, horrified, Lamont Lawson was led from the stand to the seething entrance.

The Thing spoke then.

We, the Mist, gratefully accept this gift from the people. With this new supermind which you have added to ours, we are now invincible. There can be no stopping our expansion. Lamont Lawson—step forward into my midst.

Down the narrow corridor Lawson strode, right into the very depths of the monster. He never faltered, he never once looked back. His heavy shoulders swung jauntily, and I could not be sure but I thought his fists were clenched.

The Mist resumed:

We, the Mist, shall no longer temporize or pretend. From now on, our bargains with mankind will be merely truces. You

shall purchase dearly each pause in our inexorable advance.

Our next demand is that we be fed Margery Avery, to be our wife; and Dr. Paul Avery, to feast on, all but the head. For no brain that is on the side of law and order shall ever pollute our composite mentality.

•

By then Lamont Lawson had disappeared into the bowels of the Thing. Like the closing of a trap the gelatinous corridor snapped shut. Suddenly the air was split with the Mist's angry voice—the voice of Spike Torri. The words were no longer impersonal, but strident, angry.

"Now look here, Warden! I'm running this show! Don't try to bulldoze me!"

THE booming laugh of Lamont Lawson came back, confident, triumphant.

"Why, you two-bit punk! And the rest of you mugs that are in on this—get back in your holes, where you belong! We may all be disembodied spirits here, but that doesn't change a damned thing, get it? To me, you're still a bunch of rats and I'm the boss. Want to make anything of it?"

With a great convulsion, as of two wrestlers suddenly covered with a blanket, the Mist writhed inward on itself. Seething, churning, it wrapped itself finally in a compact ball. Then it rose slowly into the air, heading southeast.

I heard later that the yellow cloud-ball passed over our cottage, and halted just above and beyond the beach. Then, spreading apart, its tentacles formed into the letters P-A-U-L. Reforming, it spelled out M-A-R-G-E-R-Y.

There was a violent churning as the thing rolled inward again into its compact ball. There was a brief struggle before the last tentacle was sucked into the orange-yellow mass.

Then the Mist rose into the sky, heading nebulously out to sea.

Warden Lawson was herding his vicious charges into oblivion.

SUICIDE SQUADRONS OF SPACE

(Concluded from page 27)

down hard and often. Dick howled:

"Craig, I'll bust every bone in your body! I'll—I'll—Ouch! Hey, cut it out! That hurts!"

"Give the password, son," Starke barked, whaling away, "or murder it gives!"

"Uncle!" Dick shouted desperately. *"Uncle!"*

Starke gave him one more whack that raised dust and blisters, and then let up. Dick stumbled to his feet, very red in the face and very sheepish.

Craig Starke got up and caught him by the ear. He led the protesting young space pilot over to where Bea Walters was standing, enjoying every minute of it.

"If you think war is hell," Starke grinned, "try marriage!" And he gave the youngster a shove which sent him straight into the girl's arms. Then he slammed out the door. . . .

"I suppose this is romance," Dick said ruefully as he wrapped one arm around the girl and rubbed his breeches tenderly with the other hand.

"Well," said Bea Walters coyly, looking into his eyes, "you've got to learn the ropes sometime!"

LOST TREASURE

BY EDMOND HAMILTON

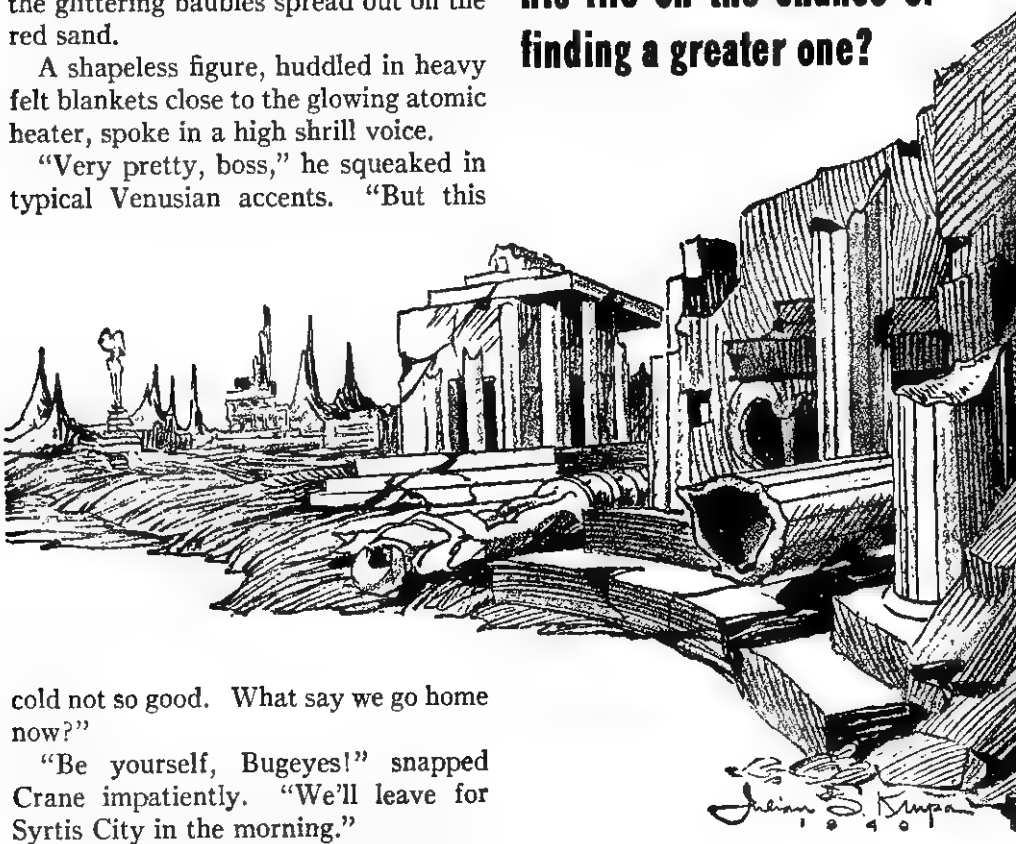
Gareth Crane faced death because of one treasure cache. Was it a good idea to gamble his life on the chance of finding a greater one?

"WHAT they'll say on Earth when we bring all *this* back!" Gareth Crane exulted. "The greatest Martian archeological find on record—a treasure worth millions!"

In his excitement, he did not feel the bone-penetrating chill of the bitter Martian night crowding sullenly down on the little camp in the ruins. His lanky, felt-clad figure was bent tautly, his lean, serious, spectacled young face feverish with excitement as he surveyed the glittering baubles spread out on the red sand.

A shapeless figure, huddled in heavy felt blankets close to the glowing atomic heater, spoke in a high shrill voice.

"Very pretty, boss," he squeaked in typical Venusian accents. "But this



cold not so good. What say we go home now?"

"Be yourself, Bugeyes!" snapped Crane impatiently. "We'll leave for Syrtis City in the morning."

"One more night in this desert, and poor Bugeyes freeze hard like board,"

Door here! said Bugeyes excitedly. "Maybe treasure here?" Crane could have kicked the Venusian

groaned the muffled figure. "Was big damned fool to leave Venus. Was much bigger damned fool to come to this world, which has remarkable absence of water, warmth and comfort."

And the shivering Venusian crouched so close to the glowing heater that the felt blankets began to scorch and had to be thrown hastily aside.

Bugeyes, as Crane had christened the amphibious swampman he had picked up as a servant on Venus, was scaled and gray and manlike, with a round head and the bulging, faceted eyes that had led to his nickname. He shivered violently, and rewrapped his blankets.

"Unlucky day when Bugeyes listen to Earthman's blandishings and sign up for servant," he moaned. "Now he doomed to die horrible death here in desert of cold. Master care nothing."

Crane paid no attention. The lanky young archeologist was feasting his gaze on the glistening objects spread on the sand in the glow of the heater.

THEY were brilliant gems, in antique Martian settings. There were sunstones from the polar hills of Mars, blue gems whose interior content of disintegrating radioactive elements gave them their unearthly scintillation; Martian emeralds like blazing green eyes; moonjewels from Saturn's satellites, throbbing living lights; great purple pearls from under the sea of Neptune; polaroid rock-crystals from the wild asteroids; and wicked, smoky firestones from Jupiter.

The stones, some faceted and others cut in curious concave cabochon* fashion, were set in beautifully worked mountings of platinum, silver and electrum. The mountings alone were very valuable. But the stones, in antiquarian value alone, were many times more so.

For this was the legended jewel hoard of Kau-ta-lah, last of the great Martian kings of Rylik—those rulers of long ago whose mighty civilization had risen and waned at a time when Earth was still steaming jungle. The vague black ruins here in the desert had once been the magnificent capital of Rylik. Here for millenniums the hoard of the great kings had lain hidden, and here Gareth Crane had found it.

Yet though Crane was an ardent planetary archeologist, his thoughts were occupied not so much with the scholarly importance of his find as with its monetary value.

"These jewels are worth at least ten millions!" he exulted. "What that money will mean to the Institute!"

"Fail to see why boss get excited, when Institute of Planetary Science get the money," complained Bugeyes.

"You dope, the Institute needs that money for its campaign against interplanetary plagues," Crane retorted. "To keep people like you and me from dying of Martian fever or Jovian croup."

Crane's serious eyes kindled as he pictured the enthusiasm of the Institute officials when he brought them back this treasure — a treasure that would give them funds for their desperately needed campaign to stamp out the interplanetary microbial diseases which had presented a grave problem ever since space travel had begun.

It was that need of the Institute which had spurred Crane in his secret search for the lost treasure of the ancient Martian king, Kau-ta-lah. Following archeological clues from ruin to lonely ruin across the desert, he had at last located the legended hoard so many had sought.

* This is a carbuncle-shaped precious stone, but not faceted. The term occurs in the French phrase *en cabochon*.—Ed.

"Hear rocket-car approaching damn fast!" said Bugeyes suddenly, standing up. "From west, I think."

Crane jumped up. He too soon heard the dim, drumming drone of rocket tubes from the starlit deserts westward.

"Who the devil would be coming to these lonesome ruins?" he exclaimed, his lean brown face stiffening.

He felt vague alarm. The waterless Martian desert, outside the few interplanetary colonial cities, was a No Man's Land extending beyond planetary law. Criminals often fled into it, though most of them soon died horribly of thirst or were forced to return.

"Bugeyes, get our stuff into the rocket car—we're not waiting till morning to leave!" Crane declared. "Hurry!"

As the Venusian hurried to obey, striking their felt tent and lugging it into the tubular rocket car nearby, Crane snatched up his jewels and stuffed them into his inside pockets.

The drone of approaching rockets was louder. At this moment, Deimos burst above the western horizon with theatrically spectacular effect. The brilliant rays of the nearer moon illumined the whole scene.*

The climbing moon showed the somber, towering black time-eaten stones around them, the vague desert stretching to the horizons. And it showed also a tubular rocket car plunging toward them across the silvered sands, its stern rocket tubes spouting steady flame.

The writhing vehicle stopped nearby and the roar of its tubes died. Three people in heavy felt suits emerged.

Crane eyed them as they came into the flaring glow of his atomic heater. The leader was a small figure who threw back the felt hood of the suit to reveal shining, bobbed blond hair.

"A girl!" Crane muttered. "What the devil—"

"Earth female here most unusual," squeaked Bugeyes, staring blankly. "Maybe boss forget a wife somewhere, and she follow?"

CRANE paid him no attention. The girl advanced to him, her feet dragging in the lead-soled gravity shoes.

Her small, firm-chinned white face had no friendliness in it, and her clear blue eyes were clouded with suspicion as she stared at the lanky young archeologist and his scaled gray servant.

"Who are you?" she demanded.

"Gareth Crane's the name," answered the wondering young archeologist. "And this is my servant, Miss—"

"Jean Edwards," she finished curtly for him. "These are my guides—Jay Sweigert and Kaubos."

Crane's eyes swept the two men curiously. Sweigert was an Earthman, grossly fat, with pendulous jowls that gave him a pseudo-jovial expression belied by his fishy eyes.

Kaubos was a squat green Jovian with the enormously wide shoulders and hollow dark eyes and queer, fingerless hands of his race. He wore very thick-soled gravity-shoes on his toeless feet.

"Two nice-looking gentlemen, I not think," muttered Bugeyes hoarsely behind Crane. "Which one you think ugliest, boss?"

"Shut up," Crane ordered.

Jean Edwards broke in then.

"Are you a prospector?" she demanded directly.

"Nope — an archeologist, from the

* Deimos, the nearer moon of Mars' peculiar and diminutive pair of satellites, would appear to move very swiftly across the heavens, but not as a great globe such as our own Luna presents. It would be almost star-like, although of great brilliance, due to the thin Martian atmosphere, and its great clarity, which would allow the rays to reach the surface unimpeded. It is certain that the spectacle is a beautiful one and the light shed by it quite perceptible.—Ed.

staff of the Institute of Planetary Science," Crane answered.

The reaction to his statement was surprising. The girl's eyes flashed, and from the two men behind her came exclamations.

"An archeologist?" wheezed Sweigert. "That's interesting—that's mighty interesting."

Kaubos, the Jovian, had put his green hand on the butt of an atom-pistol at his belt. Crane felt a sudden tension.

Jean Edwards' blue eyes were stormy. "You followed my father's translation clues to these ruins of Rylik!" she accused Crane hotly. "You're here after the jewel hoard of Kau-ta-lah!"

Crane stiffened. The jewels! He felt the cold breath of danger. Yet he answered with assumed perplexity.

"The hoard of Kau-ta-lah? Do you mean to tell me you believe in that old treasure hunters' tale?"

"I know that hoard exists," Jean Edwards retorted. "My father proved it, by deciphering the Kos inscriptions."

"Your father?" Crane repeated, wrinkling his brow.

"He's Doctor Elver Edwards," the girl answered, and added defiantly, "the greatest planetary archeologist alive."

Crane uttered a whistle of surprise. "Edwards, the Earth University man who was imprisoned for embezzling university funds?"

Jean's blue eyes hardened. "Yes. And while he is in prison, you get hold of his Kos transcriptions, find the clue to Kau-ta-lah's hoard, and come here after it!"

"Maybe they've found it, too," wheezed Jay Sweigert. The fat Earthman's fishy eyes were watching Crane closely.

"Miss Edwards, I never even heard of your father's Kos work," Crane assured the girl earnestly, and truthfully. He added, more equivocally:

"And I thought everyone had given up belief in Kau-ta-lah's treasure."

"Have you or have you not been hunting for that jewel hoard here in Rylik?" Jean demanded pointblank.

Crane hesitated. But only for an instant. He hated lying, but a lie was needed here if he was to get that fortune in jewels safely to the Planetary Institute that so direly needed it.

"I've no interest in crazy treasure tales," he answered calmly. "I've been here in Rylik studying to compose a list of the ancient kings' names, that's all. I'm through, and we were leaving."

JEAN EDWARDS' accusing gaze became less hostile.

"If that's so"—she hesitated—"I'm sorry for what I said."

"Come along, Bugeyes—time we were getting back to Syrtis City," Crane told the popeyed Venusian.

Sweigert's hand flashed an atom-pistol and aimed it at Crane's breast! The fat Earthman pointed with his other hand and yelled,

"He's lyin', Miss Edwards — he's found the jewels! Look at that sand!"

Crane glanced back, startled. Then he cursed inwardly at his own stupidity.

In the sand where he had been sitting examining the hoard, was an unmistakably clear impression of the jewels.

"See—he's had jewels on that sand, just a minute ago!" wheezed Sweigert. "Kaubos, keep them covered!"

The atom-gun of the squat green Jovian was already out, leveled at Crane and his servant.

"Most unhealthy fix, this," squeaked Bugeyes to his master. "Respectfully suggest we beat it damned fast."

"No chance now—don't start anything or they'll blast us," Crane said.

He was furious with himself. Why in the name of ten thousand devils had he been so asinine about leaving that clue? He could have wiped it out with his foot when the rocket ship first hove into sight.

Jean's blue eyes flamed. "And your lies nearly tricked me!" she flared at Crane. "You've found the hoard, through my father's work, and meant to steal it!"

Crane answered levelly, "I told you that I had never heard of your father's work, and that's the truth."

"Search them, Kaubos," ordered Sweigert.

The Jovian's flipperlike hands explored the Venusian servant's pockets first. Bugeyes emitted a shrill titter.

"Am slightly ticklesome," he apologized.

Kaubos passed on to Crane. In a minute he was drawing out the mass of jewels.

The brilliant gems spilled the light of flying Deimos in whirling scintillations as they caught the moon. Like muffled pyres of radiance, they burned in the Jovian's green hands.

Hoard of Kau-ta-lah! Legended jewels of the ancient Martian king that so many dreamers had sought and failed to find! Gathered long ago from far worlds by the space-venturing Martians of a forgotten civilization—and now about to change hands once more.

"They're worth millions!" choked Kaubos hoarsely, hollow eyes exultant. "Sweigert, we're rich—we're millionaires!"

Jean Edwards, startled by the Jovian's cry, raised her eyes from her fascinated inspection of the glittering hoard.

"*You* millionaires?" she exclaimed. "You forget that you men are only my guides. I agreed to pay you a tenth of what we found—no more. These jewels belong rightfully to my father!"

Jay Sweigert laughed wheezily, as though appreciating a funny story.

"You didn't really believe we was fools enough to take just a tenth when we could have all, did you, Miss?" he chuckled.

Jean's blue eyes widened, stunned. And Crane laughed harshly.

"So—the crooks you hired are doublecrossing you?" he rasped to the girl. "It's just what you deserve."

"Humbly beg to submit that our own necks are in precarious situation," whispered Bugeyes hastily. "Fear unhandsome fat gentlemen about to take drastic measures."

In fact, Jay Sweigert was raising a trifle the atom-pistol in his fat hand. The obese Earthman grinned at Crane and his scared Venusian servant and the stunned, unbelieving girl.

"Guess we won't need you any longer, Miss," mocked Sweigert, "nor these two lads, either. Sorry to have to do this, but—"

"Existence of innocent Venusian boy about to be terminated, boss!" squeaked Bugeyes in panic.

"Wait, Sweigert!" Crane said quickly. "Before you gun us down—can't we *buy* our lives from you?"

SWEIGERT paused, his fishy eyes narrowing.

"Why, I'm a reasonable man, always willing to do business in a fair and reasonable way," he wheezed. "Only I don't see just what you can offer for your lives, that would interest a man who owns half of those little trinkets already."

And he nodded toward the heap of blazing jewels that the Jovian was stuffing into a small sack.

Crane's brown face was a hard mask behind which his thoughts were seething. That treasure had to go to the In-

stitute—and his only hope of saving it, and their lives as well, was to stall for time. He had a crazy plan in mind, one that would at least give him a little time.

"Sweigert, what if I could lead you to a treasure greater than that jewel hoard?" he asked. "Would you let us go then?"

"A treasure greater than Kau-ta-lah's hoard?" the obese Earthman wheezed. "What kind of fairy tale is this, Crane?"

"There's a clue in these ruins to a far greater treasure in the ruined city of Ushtu, north of here," Crane explained confidentially. "It's in an inscription here that I came upon. I was on my way to Ushtu to find that greater treasure, when you came. If I translated the inscription and helped you find the Ushtu treasure, would you free us?"

Sweigert paused, considering. And Kaubos, the Jovian, burst in with thick-voiced dissuasion.

"He's lying, Jay—playing for time! He'll read some phony directions from that inscription, and we won't know whether his translation's true or not."

BUT Sweigert's greed-lit eyes had a cunning expression in them.

"There's a way we can check on Crane," he wheezed. "Miss Edwards here knows Martian hieroglyphics, remember. You said your father taught you how to translate it—didn't you, Miss Edwards?"

Jean, recovered a little from her amazement, flared at the fat criminal.

"I'll do nothing to help you!"

"I think you will," purred Sweigert. "Crane, you lead the way to that there inscription you spoke of. But—no tricks!"

Crane nodded, and started through the moonlit ruins, with Bugeyes and Jean beside him, and Sweigert and the Jovian following with drawn atom-pistols.

About them towered the remnants of legended Rylik, black and shadowy in the streaming silver light. Shapeless masses of worn stones they were, half drifted over by the desert sands, wrecks of what had once been the mighty Martian capital of the equatorial kings.

Long and long ago, three hundred thousand years before ever the first Earthman had come to Mars, the planet had been dying. The arid stretches of the desiccated world were on the increase, the water-vines that were almost the only source of moisture were perishing. It was in that twilight of a dying world that Kau-ta-lah had reigned here.

Crane's nerves, tensed by peril, felt the deathly spell of this dead city as he marched on in the moonlight. But at least, while they were alive, there was a faint shadow of hope.

They reached a broken wall beyond which loomed a grotesque statue, many times life-size, a stone figure gnawed by the ages.

"This is a statue of Kau-ta-lah himself," Crane said earnestly. "See the inscription at its base."

The stone figure was indeed that of the Martian king of long ago, a huge-chested, bald, stilt-limbed figure in ceremonial trappings and diadem. Upon the sides of the pedestal were scenes of queer Martian space ships of that forgotten era, bringing gems and treasures from far planets, offering them to the king.

But on the front of Kau-ta-lah's pedestal was a long inscription in the crescent-shaped characters of ancient Martian hieroglyphics.

Bugeyes whispered to Crane, "Boss, this I not like. If you are stalling for time, please do not. The suspense is killing me!"

"Don't worry," Crane whispered

back with a mirthless grin. "There's treasure here, all right. I'm not sticking out my neck just for the hell of it."

Then aloud: "I'll translate that for you," Crane said, but Sweigert stopped him.

"No, wait! Miss Edwards, you make a *written* translation of that first. Then I'll check Crane's translation against it."

"I won't do it!" Jean flamed, defiant.

"Do it, Jean," Crane said anxiously. "It's the only chance we've got to get out of this mess alive."

"He's right, Miss Edwards," purred the obese crook.

Reluctantly, Jean took out pad and pencil and began writing, gazing at the inscription as Kaubos played a fluoric spotlight on the worn characters.

Finally she handed the written translation of the inscription to Sweigert. The obese Earthman looked at Crane.

"Now start translating aloud," he wheezed. "If your version checks with Miss Edwards', I'll know you're reading it right. If it doesn't, one of you has tried to fool me."

Crane read the message of the hieroglyphics beneath the towering grotesque statue, in a slow voice.

Kau-ta-lah, Son of the Two Moons, King of Rylik, to all beholders:

I was a great king. I reigned in Rylik, where all my forefathers had reigned before me. I repelled the unhuman Wallus of the wastes. I sent ships to other worlds, as my fathers had done, and they brought back strange beasts and slaves and treasures such as are not known upon this world.

Yet all the treasures I have gathered together are of no worth beside the Greatest Treasure that is owned by the kings of the city Ushtu, and is hoarded by them beneath their palace. Many times did I attack their city and seek to wrest the Greatest Treasure from them, yet never could I do so.

And now the people of Rylik are dying as the water-vines fail us, and my space-captains have found no world on which we could live long, and the glory of Rylik is fading and falling. And in times to come, there will be nothing of great Rylik but an echoing name and a whisper of glory that has passed away forever and ever.

THE solemn words resounded with deep impressiveness — this bitter last message of a great Martian king, who saw his people and kingdom dying as the last frail water source perished.

Jay Sweigert had been reading from the written translation Jean had made, as Crane spoke. Now Sweigert looked up.

"Your reading checks with hers, Crane," he admitted. There was flaring greed in his fishy eyes. "So there *is* an even greater treasure than the jewels, buried under the ruins of Ushtu!"

"The Greatest Treasure?" repeated Kaubos incredulously. "What could be a greater treasure than these jewels, Jay?"

"Maybe that Greatest Treasure will be gems like no one ever heard of before," Sweigert muttered. "Maybe it's a scientific secret of some kind that enabled the armies of Ushtu to beat off the attacks of these people of Rylik. Whatever it is, that Greatest Treasure is something colossally valuable if it makes this jewel hoard insignificant, as Kau-ta-lah said."

"Yes, but they tell queer stories about those Ushtu ruins," Kaubos added uneasily. "People have vanished there—natives here are afraid to go near them—"

Sweigert's jowled fat face was scoffing. "Superstitions don't bother *me!* We're going to Ushtu—won't take but a few hours to get there in our rocket

car. Crane, can you locate the palace there?"

Crane nodded hesitantly. "I think so. The whole place is a ruin, of course, like this—but the palace site shouldn't be hard to find."

"Come along, then," Sweigert ordered. "The sooner Kaubos and I get that Greatest Treasure, the sooner you'll go free."

He chuckled, as he promised that. And Bugeyes whispered distrustfully to Crane,

"Fear fat Earthman plans to cross double again, once he gets Ushtu treasure. He laughs most unjoyful, very."

"While there's life, there's hope," Crane muttered doggedly. "And the Institute has *got* to get those jewels we found!"

They entered the rocket car. Kaubos shouldered forward to take the controls. Crane, Jean and the Venusian settled in swivel chairs behind the Jovian, at an order from Sweigert. The obese Earthman took the rear chair, his atom-pistol lazily balanced.

The rocket tubes at the back broke into a drumming drone. The car lurched forward, running smoothly over the sands on its low, flat, broad wheels, its jointed tubular body giving creakingly to accommodate itself to the inequalities of sand ridges and dunes.

Crane looked out. Phobos had risen in the starred heavens as Deimos hurtled toward the east. The two brilliant moons cast queer forked shadows beside the low car as it sped northward.

Rylik's wrecked stones receded from sight behind them. The vast, lonely moonlit Martian desert stretched away, brooding wastes tenanted only by sand and silence. Here and there were a few of the now rare water-vines, queer leafless plants that could draw moisture from far beneath the surface by capillary attraction. The vines had been the only source of water for the native Martian peoples long ago, until the plants too had withered away.

Bugeyes shivered. "Unpleasant to die on dry world like this, without even spot of water to look at," he murmured.

"And when we're dead, Sweigert will have the jewels that would have bought my father's freedom," Jean whispered.

Crane stared at her. "That's why you wanted the jewels so badly? To get your father out of prison, by making restitution of the money he embezzled?"

"My father never embezzled that money, really," Jean answered dully. "He was on Saturn, on one of his archeological expeditions, and a dreadful famine was killing the Saturnian natives in that region. He took funds of his university to relieve the famine. Enemies charged him with theft, and he was sentenced to prison. I hoped that a small part of those jewels would make restitution, and free him."

CRANE impulsively squeezed her hand. "I'm sorry, Jean—I didn't know."

The rocket car sped northward for three hours. Deimos had set, by the time they sighted the ruined city of Ushtu.

Ushtu, once as great a metropolis as Rylik, was now a similar wreck of shattered stone and drifting sands. Lonely, desolate, it sat gloomily in the moonlight, brooding on past glories.

Kaubos stopped the car near the edge of the ruins. They got out, with Sweigert's atom-gun still covering the three.

"Now, Mr. Crane, find the palace here for us," Sweigert wheezed. "Under the palace is that Greatest Treasure, if the inscription back at Rylik was right."

Crane stared doubtfully through the

chill darkness at the bewildering tangle of broken stone wrecks.

"According to plans of Ushtu I've seen, the palace of the kings was near the western edge of the city," he said.

"Lead the way, then," ordered the obese criminal. "And *don't* try dodging out of sight. I can shoot, in case you're doubtful."

"This place nothing but dry sand and busted stones like other," squeaked Bugeyes distastefully as they entered the ruins. "Understatement, to call this one hell of a world."

"I don't like these ruins, Jay," Kaubos the Jovian was muttering behind them. "What with all the stories you hear about Ushtu, it gives me the creeps."

Sweigert's wheezy laugh chuckled. "When we lift the treasure here, you'll forget your creeps quick enough."

Crane's eyes searched the moonlit masses of broken stone. He identified the broad avenue that the maps of the dead city had called the "Way of Kings." At its end should be the palace—

And when they reached the palace, and the Greatest Treasure, what then? Time was running out fast, Crane knew. The brief respite his stratagem had gained for them was nearly ended.

Down the Way of Kings toward the west the strange little party went, with the bright disk of Phobos hanging low in the sky ahead to light their way. Stumbling over the broken paving, detouring around masses of stonework that had tumbled from the sides, they approached a massive broken-walled ruin at the avenue's end.

Palace of the kings of Ushtu, those long-dead Martian lords whose Greatest Treasure even great Kau-ta-lah had vainly coveted!

"There *is* something terrifying about this place," Jean Edwards said in a low voice to Crane. "No wonder people shun it!"

They passed through an arched opening into what had been once a great court of the palace. Broken columns and statues of grotesque Martians of old lay scattered about on the flagging.

"Flash your light on those inscriptions," Crane told the Jovian. "There must be underground chambers beneath the palace, and we've got to find the entrance to them."

Kaubos directed his fluoric beam at the carven hieroglyphics Crane pointed out. Crane slowly translated aloud.

"Lords of Ushtu, owners of the Greatest Treasure, suzerains of the deserts north and south—behold our glory!"

"Behold our glory!" repeated Jean, her wide eyes sweeping the moonlit desolation of ruins about them, amid which the boasting words ironically echoed.

"It doesn't tell us anything," Crane muttered. "We must try to find a way into the underground chambers."

Crane had already noticed, at a corner of the ruined court, a small archway whose narrow stairs led down into darkness. But he had said nothing of it. He meant to draw out this search for the Greatest Treasure as long as possible, hoping for a break.

BUT Bugeyes upset his plan. The Venusian, who had been glancing around with his popping optics, suddenly pointed.

"Boss, there is stairs going down," he squeaked helpfully.

Crane could have kicked the simple-minded swampman where it would do the most good. But he pretended surprise.

"So there is. That may be the way down."

"Go ahead with the lamp, Kaubos," ordered Jay Sweigert. "I'll keep be-

hind these three to make sure they act right."

They started down the stairs, the Jovian's reddish beam flashing ahead. Up to meet them from the unguessable depths came a dank, musty odor that somehow was startling.

Crane knew the origin of that odor. He had never been here before, but he knew that smell. And his heart began to pound.

The stairs dropped downward further, and ended in a short stone passage that ran straight ahead. They moved along it, with Kaubos lighting the way. The passage ended in an open doorway.

Beyond that door lay a buried octagonal chamber two hundred feet across. The red beam flashed into it, and then the Jovian stopped, stupefied by what he saw.

"Why, look at *that!*" he husked amazedly.

The buried chamber contained a bubbling, fountaining pool of water—water that gushed up from depths far beneath, that filled all the chamber except a narrow stone ledge around it.

"That's the first time I ever saw that much water here on Mars!" exclaimed the astonished Jovian.

Bugeyes' protruding optics glistened. The amphibious Venusian squeaked,

"That water look like home, boss!"

Sweigert and Jean Edwards also were showing their surprise. Surface water was almost unknown on Mars; the water-vines that drew moisture from underground were the only source on this dying world.

But Sweigert's attention was not long to be distracted from his greed. His fishy eyes flashed cunningly.

"This must be where the treasure's hidden!" he exclaimed. "Those old Ushtu kings were clever—they sunk their treasure down here in the water, where it couldn't even be seen. Go ahead, Kaubos—we'll have a look."

The Jovian led the way forward into the chamber. They stood on the narrow stone ledge that surrounded the bubbling pool.

To their left, there stood on the ledge a towering metal statue of an ancient Martian, stilt-limbed, huge-chested, with glaring jeweled eyes and a great mace uplifted in metal hands.

"See—that statue's some kind of symbolic guard over this place!" wheezed Sweigert excitedly. "And that means—"

AT that moment came an appalling interruption. There was a shifting of the stone under their feet, a creaking as of rusty metal levers in operation.

Crash! With thunderous reverberation, a solid block of stone dropped to close the door through which they had entered.

"It's a trap of some kind, operated automatically!" Kaubos yelled in panic. "We're prisoners in here—"

"Shut up!" ordered Sweigert. "Crane, try to get that door open."

Crane, as stunned as the others by the sudden springing of this ancient trap, went to the door. One glance showed him it was useless. That solid block of stone could not be raised.

"It can only be opened by a control from outside," the young archeologist said hoarsely. We're trapped!"

"Listen—what's that?" cried Sweigert.

He and Kaubos flashed their lamp beams around. Then, for an instant, all stood frozen by sheer horror.

The metal guardian statue on the ledge was *moving*. It was striding toward them with slow, clanking steps, jeweled eyes glaring, great mace still raised above its head.

"It's *alive!*" the Jovian choked, staring wildly.

"No—it's just part of the trap—a mechanism of some kind automatically operated!" Crane yelled. "Get out of its way!"

But Kaubos seemed hypnotized by the oncoming, clanking figure. The metal statue loomed over him—

The mace flashed down, as though the thing had in it some control operated by its proximity to any living being. Straight down on the green head of the Jovian fell the mighty mace.

Jean screamed as Kaubos slumped to the floor, his brains crushed out. The statue rustily raised the mace, was coming on toward them—

"Run, you two!" Crane cried to Jean and Bugeyes. "Around the ledge away from it—don't let it catch up to us!"

But the ledge around the bubbling pool was only a few feet wide. There was no chance of evading the stalking metal figure on it.

Sweigert was firing his atom-pistol wildly at the striding statue. But the steady blast of atomic fire splashed harmlessly off the invulnerable metal. With a yell of terror, Sweigert flung away the exhausted pistol and stumbled forward with the others.

They retreated around the narrow ledge, while the metal guardian stalked relentlessly after them. The only light was the beam of the Jovian's fluoric lamp, which Crane had snatched up.

A complete circuit of the chamber they made—and still the metal horror followed them. It did not hurry; they could keep ahead of it by a fast walk. But it showed no signs of faltering or stopping, even after it had followed them around the pool for a score of times.

"Boss, how long before that thing get tired?" panted the Venusian. "Bugeyes not built for walking."

"We can't — get away from — it," gasped Jay Sweigert, his fat face livid with terror. "It'll get us in time—"

In fact, the metal automaton showed every sign of stalking around the narrow ledge until doomsday. Like a remorseless, mindless avenger, it came on with uplifted mace and sightless jeweled eyes.

Crane cursed himself for not foreseeing that the ancient Ushtu kings would have set some such guard here. This metal automaton was doubtless actuated and set into motion by the same cunning mechanism which had closed the door to trap anyone who entered the place. . . . .

BUGEYES was faltering, Sweigert gasping pitifully as he staggered on. It seemed hours that they had fled thus around the bubbling, chuckling pool.

"We can't keep this up much longer!" Crane exclaimed, panting. "Our only chance is to get down into the pool, and hang onto its edge till that thing's mechanism runs down and stops."

"Now you talking, boss!" exclaimed Bugeyes. "Little swim freshen me up, very!"

Hastily, they slid down into the bubbling waters. Their feet touched no bottom—Crane had already guessed that the pool was almost bottomless, gushing up from far depths below.

But they managed to keep afloat by clinging to the stone edge of the ledge. Jean turned a white face toward him with a brave smile. Sweigert's fishy eyes were dilated, and he was breathing in great sobs as he clung to his hold.

But Bugeyes, with a cry of pleasure, had shed his felt suit and was diving in and out of the water with manifest happiness, his protruding eyes glistening as he broke surface.

"Hot dog!" the Venusian squeaked. "This more like it! If Bugeyes got to die, he wants to die in native water!"

Sweigert was staring elsewhere. "Look—look at that metal monster!" he gasped. "It won't stop—it won't never stop!"

With clanking, reverberating strides, the automaton was stalking on and on around the ledge with upraised mace.

Each time it passed just above them, its feet grinding on the stones, Jean flinched back. Crane put his arm around her shoulders, his other hand keeping the fluoric lamp up as he held on.

The bubbling water's icy cold penetrated their limbs. The monster showed no sign whatever of stopping. Crane tried desperately to evolve some scheme of wrecking the thing, but without avail. What could harm a monstrosity like that?

SWEIGERT had become silent. Crane turned, found that the fat criminal had slipped beneath the surface.

"Bugeyes, Sweigert has sunk!" Crane yelled.

"I go after him, boss!" the Venusian cried.

The scaled, gray amphibious servant dived hastily down into the waters. Long moments elapsed. Then Bugeyes reappeared, with a mass of brilliant jewels in his hands.

"I find fat man down there, boss," he chortled, "and get jewels out of his suit before he sink further!"

"You let him drown?" Crane accused, and the Venusian stared blankly.

"Sure, boss—but I get jewels. That what you wanted, isn't it?"

Crane's lips tightened. He had no reason to feel pity for Sweigert—but he had meant for Bugeyes to save the fat criminal, nevertheless. And Bugeyes had misunderstood completely.

"Too late to help it now," he muttered to Jean. He stowed the jewels into his own suit. "We've got the hoard of Kauta-lah back—not that it looks as if we'll ever get out with it."

"I—I can't hold on much longer," Jean whispered. "Let me sink, when the time comes. I don't want to drag *you* down."

"Hell, there must be some way out of this devil-trap!" Crane cried.

The chuckling bubble of the waters around him was sardonic in its answering laughter. The metal automaton still strode endlessly around and around the nightmare chamber.

But the bubbling chuckle of the waters insinuated an idea in Crane's brain. He maneuvered around toward the Venusian.

"Bugeyes, there may be a way out of here for *you,* at least!" he exclaimed. "The bubbles in this water –they're air, which means the underground spring that feeds this pool has a connection through some crevice or cleft with the upper air. If you could swim down and find such a connection, you could possibly win clear."

Bugeyes looked anxious. "No, boss —won't go and leave you here."

"You've got to — it's our only chance!" Crane insisted. "For if you can get out and come back to the outside of that door, it's just possible that you can set us free. I believe that the door opens when anyone starts down that stairs toward it—otherwise, it wouldn't have been open when we came down to this hellish trap."

Bugeyes looked doubtful still, but finally assented.

"I try it then, boss. Swim way down and look for opening. If find one, good! If not, my number damned well up."

The amphibious servant breathed deeply for several moments, then with a darting movement dived down into

the bubbling interior.

"It's an impossibility," Jean murmured. "Nobody could swim down to such depths as that and find a way out."

"Bugeyes may be able to," Crane muttered, hoping against hope. "Those Venusians can stay underwater a tremendously long time."

MINUTES passed, but nothing changed. Bugeyes didn't reappear. The automaton clanked relentlessly on around the chamber.

Crane listened tensely for a step outside the stone-sealed door of the chamber. But there was no such sound. His faint hopes waned. Despair darkened in his brain, as he was aware that Jean's frozen hands could no longer cling to the stone ledge.

He was holding her up by his own strength. But his energy was running out fast. Better to let go and sink together into the numbing depths, he thought, than prolong the useless struggle.

He chuckled harshly. "Drowned on Mars! At least, it's a crazily improbable way to end up. But I wish—"

A clash of stone and metal, a flood of faint light pouring down into the chamber! The block in the door was slowly *rising!*

"By heaven, Bugeyes got through!" Crane yelled. "Jean, look—"

The door was open. And the metal automaton had halted in its former position to the left of the opening. Not only halted, but it had resumed its age-old post!

The staggering, dripping, shivering figure of a scratched, woebegone Venusian appeared outside the door.

"Stay out there, Bugeyes—don't enter or you'll start the automaton moving again!" Crane yelled. "We're coming out!"

He clambered up with Jean, dragging the girl onto the ledge. Two quick strides—and they were out of the chamber, on the stairway, safely escaped from the ancient treasure trap of Ushtu!

As Crane worked to revive the girl, Bugeyes chattered,

"Between ourselves, boss, that one hell of a swim! Bugeyes get down to the little underground river far below, carried away on it, swim back up it, find crevice and get up through that crevice to the ground, outside this cursed city. Bugeyes come back here—"

"And when you started down the stairs here, the door automatically opened, as I'd thought it would!" Crane cried. "And that metal monster went back to its place."

He chafed the girl's wrists. "Jean, we're safe!"

She clung to him, shuddering from the reaction.

"We've got the jewels, too," Crane exulted.

"*You* have them," she answered. "You found them."

Crane shook his head. "The Institute can spare enough of them to make restitution and free your father, Jean. We're partners in this. Partners—I like the sound of it, Jean!"

"If boss can spare time from romancing," broke in Bugeyes, "what about Greatest Treasure here in Ushtu? We get that too?"

"Yes," Jean remembered, "is the Greatest Treasure down in that pool somewhere, as Sweigert thought?"

Crane grinned haggardly. "Your father may have taught you how to read hieroglyphics, Jean, but you don't know much about Martian archeology. No more than Sweigert or Kaubos knew."

"What do you mean?" she asked puzzledly. "There *is* a Greatest Treasure, isn't there?"

(Concluded on page 131)

Tarig lifted the corpse of old H'ggins into the time cabinet

MURDER *in the* TIME WORLD

By MALCOLM JAMESON

"They can't accuse me of a crime when there is no evidence that it has been committed," said Karl Tarig. So he sent the body of the murdered man into the future. But he didn't realize the truth of the adage: Time will tell!

KARL TARIG shot a cautious glance toward Dr. Claude Morrison. The man had his back to him, poring over his precious formulas. Tarig leaned over and, still watching craftily, unhooked the main power lead from its terminal on the D-4 Accelerator. Then he straightened up.

"I say, Claude, did you mean to leave this cable disconnected?"

Dr. Morrison looked around, obviously irritated.

"What? Of course not!" Morrison strode across the laboratory.

"That is some more of your clumsiness, Karl," he remarked tartly, staring down at the heavily insulated wire. "I ran a test on the machine only this morning."

Tarig moved as if to pick the cable up.

"No, no," objected Morrison. "You'll be blowing the main tube next. I can't have that. The whole available world supply of faradium is in its filament. It would take ten years to accumulate that much again."

With deft fingers Dr. Morrison reset the switches and repaired the connection, Tarig watching sullenly.

"What about the temperature of the detonon?" asked Morrison sharply. Time machines were the scientist's hobby; explosives his work.

"It's okay; I just looked."

Tarig's manner was carelessly indifferent, as though he didn't give a damn.

Morrison snorted and walked hastily down the aisle between the lead-topped laboratory tables to where the fuming mixing vat sat. He checked the trickle of sulfuric acid, the speed of the rotating paddles churning the potent explosive, and the setting of the rheostat on the refrigerating machine. He made a few adjustments, then turned on Tarig.

"I've tried to impress on you, Karl, the danger in these experiments with super-explosives. That is why this laboratory is set back here in the hills, forty miles from nowhere. The acid generates heat, and heat will set the stuff off while it's in this stage. If you don't keep it chilled—well, it's bang!—up we go."

"Yes, sir," mumbled Tarig. He wasn't quite ready for the showdown. Not yet. There was something he had to learn; that was why he broke the

connection.

"I'm wondering also, Karl," Morrison went on, for he had suffered in patient silence for a long time, "whether my bringing you here was such a good idea after all. You only show up when you feel like it; and even when you come, I can't depend on you to do what I tell you. Moreover, I don't like the way you're stringing that Waren girl along. She's an innocent little thing, and doesn't know the slightest bit about your past."

"My hard luck, you mean," retorted Tarig flaring.

"Your drinking and gambling away of your father's fortune wasn't hard luck. And those embezzlement charges they brought against you in Fairfield wasn't hard luck . . ."

"It was a frame-up," Tarig growled.

"I took your word it was a frame-up," said Morrison calmly, "but in view of the way things have been disappearing around here—well, I am not so sure. I am beginning to regret I hired you—gave you a chance when no one else would."

Tarig merely glowered. He knew he could break Morrison in two with his bare hands, but he had a better plan. All it needed was one more detail, and that he would have to get from Morrison himself. He must pretend a little longer.

"I'm sorry, Claude," he said, with appearance of meek submission. "I didn't realize. . . I'll try to do better."

Morrison looked at him sharply, and wondered. Was he being unjust? Perhaps Karl Tarig was only stupid, lazy. One could not be blamed for that.

"We'll see," he said, and walked back toward his desk.

"I WISH I knew more about this machine," Karl Tarig said, as they passed abreast the Accelerator.

Morrison stopped and looked at him again. Tarig had assisted him in his experiments with the smaller model machine and certainly should understand the larger, full-size one they had built since. The two were identical in principle. It was only that the new model could accommodate a human being that made the difference.

"Oh, I know it is a kind of time machine," said Tarig hastily, correctly reading the puzzled frown on the scientist's brow. "I saw you put that cage of canaries in the first model and saw it disappear, and then reappear three days later, still singing.

"And I helped you with the cat—the time you shot it a month ahead into the future. But why doesn't the machine disappear too? All the time machines I've ever heard about went along with their inventor, like an automobile."

"That is an intelligent question," answered Morrison, a little mollified, "and I don't mind answering it."

The two strangely contrasted men were standing before the queer contraption that stood on a step-high platform, in the corner of the outer stone walls of the squat laboratory building. No one would have guessed the two men to be cousins. For Tarig was tall and of massive build, with a heavy-jawed, stolid face, while Dr. Morrison was much shorter and more slender, with expressive features and keen, intelligent eyes.

Morrison indicated the ovoid shell of translucent material that hung like a hood over the single chair sitting on the platform. Despite its queer, shell-like shape, it was a vacuum tube, and it was laced with greenish filaments, from whose outer terminals a maze of braided wire led through a set of controls within easy reach of a person seated within the machine itself. From the

regulating lever in the control quadrant, a cable led to a nearby switch panel, behind which stood yet another bank of tubes.

"The force-field of that faradium tube," Morrison explained, "has the effect of inhibiting all molecular motion within it.* An object placed there ceases to exist the moment the current is turned on. The inhibition is not permanent, but is proportional to the time of exposure to the field. Sooner or later the effect will wear off and the object will resume its former condition. It is not exactly time travel—it is more a catapulting into time."

"Like shooting off a cannon," observed Tarig.

"Exactly!" exclaimed Morrison, surprised and pleased that Tarig should comprehend so well. He was beginning to feel he *had* been hasty in his judgment.

"Like a cannon, the machine does not have to follow its projectile. That is why I call it an Accelerator and not a time machine, although even that term is a little misleading. All the Accelerator really does is cause things to cease to exist temporarily, for all practical purposes. In the meantime, time passes the subject being 'projected'. The subject has the illusion of time travel. Actually, the subject waits for time to catch up."

"I see," said Karl Tarig. As a matter of fact, he already knew that much. What he wanted to know—*had* to know—was the scale at which the machine was set.

"But what I don't get," he asked, "is how much exposure puts you how far into the future?"

"Oh," said Morrison, "the graduations on the quadrant? Well, I haven't had time to calibrate that accurately yet. It will work out as a curve of some sort. The longer the machine runs, the farther it'll shoot the subject. For example, the first few seconds cause a disappearance of about an hour per second. Once the machine is warm and the field concentrated, I compute that each hour of exposure will jump the subject another ten years ahead."

"I see," said Karl Tarig absently. His eyes were roving the windows. Old Man Higgins, the caretaker, was nowhere in sight. He must have gone home, as the sun was setting. Ellen Warren would be coming about seven with the night lunches for himself and Morrison, prepared by her widowed mother in their little cottage over the hill. It was not much past six just then.

"I hope some day," Dr. Morrison was saying, "to personally make a test trip in the machine longer than the few short ones I've made lately. I mean a really long one—one of several years. If I only had a chance to get away from this routine of developing new explosives so that I could play with my hobby more. . . ."

"YOU'VE got that chance now, pal!" The abrupt change in Karl Tarig's manner was explosive in its suddenness. Dr. Morrison whirled to face a countenance distorted with murderous fury. There was envy there, and jealousy, but staring starkly at him was sheer gloating—the lust of cruelty for cruelty's own sake.

Two hair-matted paws of hands closed tightly about his throat, choking, choking. Through a red mist Morrison glimpsed the leering, panting face that bore down on him. He tried to struggle, sputtered once, as the more powerful man shifted his grip. Then, with purpling face, he slipped into unconsciousness.

Tarig released his hold and let the limp scientist slip to the floor. He viewed the twitching figure calmly.

Heretofore he had refrained from major crime because he was yellow—afraid. Afraid of the law—the noose or the chair. But he was bold now. He was immune from the law. To hell with the law! For he had thought out the perfect crime. There could be no dangerous consequences. You can't hang a man for murder without a body—a *corpus delicti*. For the first time in the history of crime, a murderer had at his disposal the sure means of ridding himself of his corpse.

"He wanted to try out a long stretch," muttered Tarig. "All right, he'll have a century. I'll soak him in the juice all night."

He reached down and caught Morrison by the wrists, meaning to drag the scientist up into the Accelerator. He would set the lever all the way over—ten or twelve hours, and then pull the switch. No more Morrison. No more hateful condescension and lectures. He stepped backward, dragging his victim easily.

It was then that he heard Ellen Warren's cheery "Yoo-hoo!" outside.

"Damn!" muttered Tarig, his face suddenly white. She was early, by a full half hour. He could not get the machine started before she would be in the room. She would see Morrison, and that would spoil the little scheme he had planned for her, for his plan included her as well as his employer.

Then he thought of the storeroom back of him, the only inner room in the building. With a savage yank and a heave, he skidded the unconscious Morrison to its door, tossed him in and pulled the door to. He had just time to slip the padlock into the hasps and snap it shut before Ellen's step was heard on the gravel at the outer door.

"WHERE'S Claude?" she asked, smiling as she came forward. Tarig drew a deep breath of relief.

"He's gone off somewhere," he said slowly, trying to return her smile, his eyes never leaving her. "He won't be back, so we needn't wait for him."

"He can't be far," she said. "His car is still outside. It'll be better to wait. He's been very cordial to me, and to you too, Karl."

"A little too cordial, if you ask me," Tarig said harshly, in spite of himself. "I don't like the way he's been trying to make up to you, kid."

"Silly! I meant he's been such a—good friend, you know."

"Well, skip that. He's gone, I tell you. He's out of it."

"Gone where?" she demanded, seemingly a little uneasy. Ellen did not like the rough attitude Tarig was showing. She had never seen him like that.

Suddenly he felt unable to restrain himself from blurting out,

"Gone into the future, you damn little fool!" Then, realizing he had told more than he meant to, he tried to cover hastily.

"You know what a nut he is about this time machine he invented. Well, he's off to try it. Said for me to take over and run things here until we caught up with him."

Ellen looked him in the face incredulously. She took a swift sideward step and laid her hand against the ovoid hood over the Accelerator's throne-like seat. The machine was cold.

"You're lying, Karl Tarig," she cried. "That machine has not been used for hours. I know. I helped him with the little model! It was my cat he used."

THERE was a scuffling in the storeroom, and a muffled moan.

"He's in there!" Ellen screamed, staring at the locked door. "You've done something to him!"

Tarig sprang at her and dragged her to his chest in an embrace of iron.

"Okay, baby, I'll get tough if you make me. You asked for it. Now get this: he hasn't gone yet, but he's going —going way to hell-and-gone into the future. And then we follow, but not so far. Yes, we! First you, then me."

"Let me loose, you fiend!" Ellen cried, plunging her clenched fists between them as a pair of buffers, and at the same time kicking him with all the force she could put behind her sharp little toe.

"Take it easy, kid." Tarig was laughing. It was all so simple. "I'd smooth you down now, but I've got things to do. When you wake up, I'll be here. I'll have a lot of dough, and there won't be anything but woods all around. You'll make a pretty face then, I'll bet!"

"Money—woods?" she asked, quieting down with an intense effort. She was stalling to see if she could hear more sounds from the storeroom. Maybe old Higgins would come in; she had passed him at the gate lodge. Ellen knew she must get a grip on herself and play a part, for she was desperately frightened. Tarig had gone mad.

"Money!" Tarig was saying. "Think of what the platinum dishes in this place will bring, and the gold that he keeps in the safe for those fool fulminates! I'll materialize first and sell that, learn the lay of the land, and then be ready for you. When you come to, you'll be in the woods here, but I'll be right by you, baby."

Ellen was frantic. "You can't do this foolish thing, Karl," she urged, now that she knew something of what was going on in his mind. "People will come here tomorrow, looking for us, and the police—they'll know what happened—"

"That's where you're wrong, kid. They won't," Tarig sneered. "Because tomorrow there won't be any building here, or any Accelerator, or any of Mr. Smartaleck Morrison's notes on how to build one. I've got brains, kid. I've thought of everything. Trail along with me, baby, and you'll wear diamonds!"

He pawed her, trying to bring her mouth up to his, but only half succeeded. Then he lifted her bodily and sat her down inside the time machine.

"No!" Ellen shrieked, fighting back, and half slipping from the seat.

Tarig's answer was a hard slap and a savage push that jammed the girl's slender body into the niche in the machine.

"You'll be all right, honey-pie," Tarig said mockingly. "I haven't time now, but ten years from now. . ."

He strode across to the switchboard. The two hardest steps along the road to riches and independence were behind him. From now on it was nothing but a matter of timing. He set the knobs on the board the way Morrison had taught him, pulled the big knife-switch. Electricity was up to the notched quadrant.

"So long, kid. I'll be seeing you," Tarig said to the unconscious girl. The lever was in the one-hour position. His finger pressed the button and he jumped back into the clear.

He heard the rising whine, saw the silvery threads of living fire leap out and lace into the fair flesh before him; saw that flesh quiver under the tingling impact, then vanish. Ellen Warren was gone. Gone to the year 1950!

CHAPTER II

Escape

KARL TARIG noted the time—6:32 p. m. That was fine. Then the

juice would automatically cut off at 7:32. After that it would be Morrison's turn. He would give Morrison most of the night to ride, or at least ten hours. That would be a century. Far enough away for burial of a telltale corpse.

He remembered then the sounds he had heard in the storeroom. Morrison must have revived. Well, it wouldn't do him any good. Tarig went over to the storeroom door and unlocked it, trying to get used to the steady, shrill whistling of the vibrating Accelerator. Somehow it got on his nerves, that hideous, incessant noise.

He threw the door open and looked in. Morrison was facing him, weaving unsteadily on his feet, clutching at his splotched, bruised throat. He stared at Tarig a moment and then spoke, hoarsely and with difficulty.

"I overheard your fiendish plan," he rasped.

"Oh, yeah? So what?" Tarig sneered, and reached for him.

"One minute," objected Morrison, with what dignity he could muster. "You are a powerful brute and I can't stop you, but you'll hang for this as sure as hell! I have seen to that. Tomorrow the authorities will have the full details of it. And what's more, you'll never see Ellen Warren again, unless it is as a witness in court. Now go ahead, if you dare!"

"You bet I will, you fourflushing little shrimp!" Tarig had his heavy hand on the scientist's shoulder. He jerked him forward and hustled him out the door. He flung him down in front of the humming, screeching time machine.

"Your threats don't worry me any," Tarig blustered. "As soon as the girl friend makes the trip, you go next. After that, I'll search that storeroom. The police won't find your notes. Anyhow, it wouldn't matter. This building won't be here. I'm blowing it up behind me."

"You can't beat the game, Karl," Morrison warned again, wearily this time. "I've gotten a message through."

"Yeah!" spat Tarig. "The only telephone is down at the lodge. That was *your* idea—you and your privacy!"

Tarig produced a coil of insulated wire and tied Morrison hand and foot. He thought of killing him instead, but decided to wait. No harm to let him suffer a little.

"Now, my dear, dear cousin," he taunted, "I'm going to make a little package of your valuables. You are quite right about the leakage. I've been selling your platinum evaporating dishes. They are as good as gold. Ten years from now, the rest of the stuff here will come in very handy."

He sauntered off down the aisle, collecting the valuable equipment as he went, and took it to the heavy worktable in the far corner. There he battered the platinum dishes flat, and then made them into a bale and wired them together. He went through the safe and added what was there to a second bundle. He carried the bundles to the Accelerator and placed them on the floor beside it.

Time dragged. Tarig grew more and more uneasy as the machine droned on. Ellen was taking an interminable time, he thought. Suppose somebody should come in. But then, nobody ever came to this place. The sign on the gate said "Keep Out." There was Higgins, but Higgins had gone home.

At last the machine quit whistling, choked and died. It was 7:32. Tarig felt relieved. With Morrison gone, there would be no evidence against him. He hoisted the helpless scientist to his feet, shoved him into the chair. Then he stepped back and pulled out a wicked-looking clasp-knife.

"I'm going to. . ."

"No! You leave him be!" came the shrill, squeaky voice of Old Man Higgins.

Tarig wheeled to face the fiery old man, his eyes blazing with loyal indignation.

"You've done plenty for one night, but you ain't committed murder yet, and you better not. I've been a-watching you and I called the police more'n half an hour ago. They'll be here any time now . . ."

"So you were peeking in the window, you gray-headed old buzzard!" bellowed Tarig. "Well, take that, you meddling . . ."

HE snatched a heavy steel pestle from a quart-crushing mortar that stood on the table nearest him, hurled it with all his tremendous strength straight into the face of the senile Higgins. The old man flopped backward, splashing blood and brains. Tarig gave the body one contemptuous glance, then turned to Morrison.

"Dirty old liar," he said. "The phone line went down with the bridge in yesterday's storm."

Morrison glared at him. "The repair wagon went by about two hours ago," he managed. "But get on with your dirty work. You've committed one murder, so I know you won't stop at mine. Remember, all I ask, when they lead you to the scaffold, is that it was I who sent you there."

"Yeah? How? You wasn't near any phone," Tarig taunted.

"I had the little Accelerator model," said Morrison quietly. "I sent the news into the future."

Tarig's eyes nearly popped from his head. He dashed into the storeroom, then dashed back.

"The little model's there all right, but it's burnt out."

"Yes," said Morrison with a smile, "it is burned out."

"For a minute I thought you had me," grinned Tarig, sweating. Then his manner changed to ferocity.

"Okay—you tried! Now, let's get going."

He shoved the lever over the full sweep of the quadrant—a century forward. Then with rapid, heavy strokes of the knife, he severed the veins in both of Morrison's wrists.

"You'll set a new record for slow bleeding, Cousin Claude. What a surprise you'll be to 'em in 2040, popping out of nowhere, spouting blood this way!"

He touched the button. Morrison, bound and bleeding, went hurtling into the future. All he left behind him was an empty chair full of silvery fire, and ounces of his blood on the floor beneath. The clock said 7:44.

Tarig perched himself on a stool and watched the slow pace of the clock's hands. If time had dragged while Ellen was in the machine, it had come to a full stop now. For the more he thought things over, the more uneasy he became. From time to time he would slip off the stool and pace the floor like a caged jackal.

Ten hours for Morrison! That would take until five—no, nearly six in the morning. And then after that, he had to dispose of Higgins' body before he went himself. Damn Higgins!

Mrs. Warren would be raising hell if Ellen wasn't back by daylight. He could kill her too, of course, but that meant more delay. His plan wasn't working out so well. He would have to speed things up, somehow. He might have to cut Morrison's time down.

He tried to make the time go faster by searching the storeroom. All that was there were shelves filled with bottles and jars of rare chemicals, and a

table. The first, model time machine stood on the table—cold and empty. The filaments had melted down. Tarig looked for a note, but all he could find was the ragged stumps where five pages had been torn from the apparatus inventory. If Morrison had put those pages into his pocket, they were gone into the future with him.

He shrugged and gave up the search.

Then he began to think more and more about what Higgins had said. Had he telephoned? Was the phone working? It worried him to distraction.

FINALLY he could stand it no longer. He left the building, strode down the hill toward the gate. He passed Morrison's parked car, and Ellen's battered flivver. Let the cars stay where they were—he wasn't caring about them as evidence. At the gate lodge he picked up the phone and tried it. It was connected. He dropped the receiver on its hook, sat there in a panic of misgiving. Maybe the police *were* on the way . . .

"Police station, Cartersburg?" Tarig asked finally. "This is the Morrison lab . . ."

"Anything new?" a desk official broke in.

"Nothing to bother you about—just an old drunk. Did he call you?"

"Yes. Our men ought to be there any time now. Who are you?"

Tarig hung up, ashen-faced and shaking like a leaf. The old man *had* done it! He started to call back and tell the police to cancel the call, and then he realized how foolish that would be. If they were on the way—well, the damage was done. If only that bridge detour would stop them.

Shakily, he went out into the dark. Away off in the distance he thought he heard the wail of a siren. In a frenzy of fear he dashed for the laboratory. The moment he was inside, he flipped open the switch and killed the Accelerator. Panting, he looked up at the clock. It was just nine. Already his scheme was badly bawled up, but at least Morrison's body was out of the way.

He tugged at the gory corpse of old Higgins and managed to get him into the niche in the time machine. Again he pushed the button, but this time there was a blast of light; then silence. A circuit-breaker had blown back at the main switchboard. He ran back to shove it in, and as he passed the slowly stirring batch of detonon, he remembered that he had *that* to attend to as well.

Sweating, Tarig stopped and killed the refrigerating machine, but left the acid and the paddles running. He allowed himself now a gloating smile for all his wild fear—he was setting a grand trap for those nosy police. Let 'em come.

But he had to get out pretty quick himself. He slapped in the circuit-breaker and ran back to the time machine. This time it started. Old Higgins, as had Morrison and Ellen Warren, vanished into the future.

But even as his hand left the button, Tarig heard fresh sounds outside. There was a car coming up the drive—several of them. He heard them crunch to a stop, and the voices of men running around the building. In a frenzy of abject fear he instantly stopped the machine, huddled himself in the seat in which he had placed his victims. There was little time left, for feet were tramping on the steps at the door now.

A coward always, he dreaded closing the switch that would fling him into the unknown. That shuddering tremble, the silver fire, the whine and whistle of it all! Yet Claude Morrison had gone through the ordeal twice, and said it

didn't hurt. Still Tarig had the impulse to jump up and run away . . .

"Open! Open! In the name of the law!"

Tarig stared at the telltale blood on the floor. No, it was this way or the gallows! He threw the lever over all the way, and jabbed at the switch.

The lights went round in giddy circles . . . a thunderous hammering on the door . . . crashing wood panels . . . purple and green spots on velvety blackness . . . he was swelling, swelling tremendously, expanding to include all the heavens . . . stretching beyond all endurance, until something within him burst in a wild chaos of darting flame and stabbing flashes of unbearable light . . . cool, inky blackness . . . oblivion.

CHAPTER III

The Plot Thins

"NO, Chief, it ain't possible," State Police Sergeant Mullaney was saying. "We've searched every inch of ground for a thousand yards around. There wasn't so much as a finger. And no trails either—Sam brought out his hounds. They was all just blown to smithereens, that's how I figure it."

Deputy Inspector Hartridge glanced from Mullaney's face to the smoking ruins before him. No question but that it had been a terrific explosion. The north and west walls had borne the brunt of it and they were lying flat. For many hundreds of feet trees had been uprooted and flung away like matches. Five automobiles, thoroughly smashed, lay on their sides or tops against the remains of the Cyclone fencing.

"You had two men hurt, you say?"

"Yes, sir—they was in the cars," Mullaney said. "Nobody was in the building. We was searching the woods."

"Now let me get this straight—from the beginning." Hartridge, erect and severe, pulled out his notebook. His cold, steely eyes and high-bridged narrow nose bespoke the relentless policeman, and the thin, grim line of his tight lips did not belie the picture.

"Higgins, the caretaker, called up at four minutes past seven with an excited story about the laboratory assistant—Karl Tarig?"

Mullaney nodded.

"Said Tarig was feeding a girl into a machine. One Ellen Warren. He said it was as good as murder, or kidnaping, anyhow. Does that make sense to you?"

Mullaney scratched his head. "No, Chief, it don't. You hear cracks about knocking people into the middle of next week, but that's just foolin'. The old man meant what he said—that the machine would knock 'em into the middle of year after next or something. Kidnaping, he said . . ."

"M-mmm," murmured Hartridge. "A nice technical point, if true. Taking somebody where he doesn't want to go is certainly kidnaping. We *might* make a charge stick on that . . ."

"Anyhow," Mullaney went on, "we shoved off right away. It was a tough ride, but we got here about nine, surrounded the joint, and then broke in the door. There wasn't a soul inside. All we found was two machines running. We didn't dare touch 'em for fear they'd blow up in our face."

"Was this Morrison a crackpot inventor?"

"Oh, no, sir. He was a serious, hard-working guy—doped out new ways to make fancy dynamite and such. Of course, I do hear he had a queer machine he was playing with, but there's nothing screwy about the guy himself."

"Go on. You found the place empty . . .

"Yes, and I mean empty. We

looked. But there was blood on the floor, plenty. That was funny, too, because there was no trails leading away from it, or bodies, or anything."

"The murderer bandaged his victims up and carried them off," suggested Hartridge, looking sharply at the trooper.

"Not a chance. You see yourself, Chief, how soft the ground is all around. Even the road gravel stops at the gate. We got right out, with lamps, and began hunting. There wasn't a damn thing. If they got away at all, it was in a helicopter from off the roof."

"Yes, yes. So you were all out circling in the woods when the explosion occurred?"

"Yessir. Bam! she went, and we was all knocked cuckoo and throwed forty ways. That musta been around half-past ten. We wouldn't know. All our watches were busted."

"I'll try to pick up the time from the seismograph record in the city," said Hartridge shortly. "Then?"

"Well, by the time we came to, the place was burning to beat hell and we couldn't get near it. I phoned a nine-county alarm around, with Tarig's description. He has a record a mile long . . ."

"I know about Tarig," snapped Hartridge.

"And that's all," finished Mullaney.

Hartridge squinted at the ruins.

"She looks cool enough now. Get in there and comb the place. I think you missed a bet through being afraid of those machines."

Mullaney looked at him resentfully, but did not talk back.

"Okay, men," he called to his assistants, "let's go. It's four burnt torsos we want—or skulls will do."

"CLEAN as a whistle," reported Mullaney, two hours later. "It was sure a hot fire—didn't leave nothing."

Hartridge quit the report he was drawing up in the gate-lodge and looked out the now glassless windows. It was noon of a fine, calm day. Not a leaf was stirring.

"I'll have a look," he said.

They plowed through ankle-deep charred rubbish to the middle of it.

"Show me where the machines were," ordered Hartridge.

"There was a tub of stinky stuff about here," said Mullaney, at the spot where the mixing vat had stood. "It was swirling around and smoking . . ."

"That is what blew up," observed Hartridge, looking about him. The trunks of the fallen trees radiated from where he stood. "Now the other."

Mullaney led him to the sole standing corner of the building, and pointed out the charred and blackened stumps of the floor joists.

"It was up there—a sort of throne-chair arrangement, like in the lodge hall back at Cartersburg. There was a chair with a canopy over it and white fire playing all over it, whistling away. But nobody was in the chair, except that whoever was cut *had* been in it, because that was where the blood was."

Hartridge stood silently staring at the blank stone walls, then examined the ground at his feet. Among the ashes lay lumps of fused glass, masses of twisted wire, and broken slabs of slate. That was all that remained of the D-4 Accelerator.

"This junk was up there," Mullaney explained, pointing slightly upward. "But you can see there's not so much as a bone in the place. Of course, when the fellow gets here with the rakes . . ."

He stopped in mid-sentence with a gasp. For at that instant a gory apparition hung in mid-air just above their heads and between them. It was a man in a cramped sitting posture,

dressed in blue overalls spotted over with gouts of blood. It started falling, and with a soft plop struck the ground, sending up little eddies of ashes. The body toppled sideward. Its face was horribly obliterated, with jagged edges of skullbone jutting where cheeks and forehead had been.

"My God — H i g g i n s — I'll be damned!" cried Mullaney. He shot a frightened look up into the still, cloudless sky. "It's a ghost . . ."

"Nonsense," snapped Hartridge. But the deputy inspector was nonplussed for the first time in his spectacular police career. The body was untouched by fire, its bloody, matted hair unsinged. But it was very, very dead . . .

"About two hours, I should say," reported the doctor, rising from the corpse.

Hartridge whistled. Where had the body been? The bloodstains were at least fifteen hours old. The explosion had occurred more than thirteen hours before. The police had been on the spot continuously.

"What's more," the doctor added, "the blood smear I scraped off the floor near where the milky brain stuff was, is the same type as his, though the blood closer to the chair is different."

He frowned. The scattered brains and blood matched that of the corpse's, but the two hours' difference between the bloodstains and the explosion didn't jibe. Hartridge's cold eyes were boring into him relentlessly. The doctor suddenly realized he was rattled.

"At least . . ." he started to hedge.

"Never mind," barked the inspector. "The whole thing is screwy."

He wheeled and stalked back toward the spot where the center of the explosion had been. He checked himself with a start, and passed a hand hastily across his eyes.

"Mullaney!" he roared.

"Yessir!"

"Do you see what I see?"

MULLANEY gaped. Slowly drifting in the utterly dead air, several sheets of paper were being wafted down into the ashes. They could have come from nowhere, as there was no plane overhead, nor a breath of breeze. One by one they finished their lazy zigzagging and came to rest on the dead embers.

Hartridge picked them up and arranged them in the order they were marked. They were torn ledger sheets, the fine ink writing written across boldly with a heavy lead pencil. The first page bore the caption, "Urgent, For the Police." Hartridge read,

I have been assaulted and choked into insensibility by my assistant, Karl Tarig. I have regained consciousness and find I am locked in my storeroom. I can hear him making certain threats to Miss Ellen Warren outside.

The details of the plan are not clear, but it appears he means to rob me, abduct her and escape into the future. He will dispose of me by sending me still further into the future, but whether alive or dead I do not know. He also intends destroying this building behind him to cover his trail. This he can do with ease by cutting off the refrigeration of the batch of detonon now mixing. It will explode within a couple of hours.

As to his method of getting into the future, he is using an invention of mine designed to propel objects forward in time. The scale is unreliable, but an hour's exposure to the machine will cause a body to disappear for approximately ten years, after which it will materialize at the same spot.

His plan is to reappear first, after a certain number of years during which he expects his crimes to be forgotten. Then he will sell the platinum he has stolen from here, find a place to live, and be back to receive Miss Warren, who will follow him closely. That is all I know. The details depend upon the timing. According to my watch, he put her into the machine at 6:32.

Since I am to disappear also, and this building is to be blown up with all my notes and machines, the only way I can get this information to you is through a small model machine I built earlier for experimentation on small animals. Its filament is practically worn out and will burn in two as soon as it gets hot—a matter of fifteen seconds or so.

But that will be time enough. I assume that if the building does blow up during the night, you police will be on the spot to receive this note around midday tomorrow.

Do not dismiss this information as a joke because it seems to materialize out of nothing, but treat it as proof of what I have just written. Mrs. Warren—the girl's mother—can confirm the existence of the machines. I used her cat in one . . . I must stop. I hear Tarig coming for me . . . the time is 7:3— . . .

"A plant, Chief?"

"It looks genuine," said Hartridge thoughtfully, folding the papers and putting them in his pocket. "As far as I can check, he certainly called his shots."

Deputy Inspector Hartridge paced the soft ground beside the ruins of the laboratory. His chin was sunk on his chest, and his hands were clasped behind his back. He was trying to make x, and y, and z, come out to a 2 and 2 that he could make 4 of. The girl was in from 6:32 to 7:30—about an hour. Ten years, more or less, for her. Higgins he could dismiss from the equation. The old man could not have occupied the machine more than a few seconds. That left three hours unaccounted for. How was it divided between the two men?

A moment's reflection told him, approximately.

"Mullaney!" Hartridge called, coming to an abrupt halt and again taking charge. The police photographer was at the moment folding up his tripod and preparing to leave.

"When the coroner is through with Higgins, let 'em bury him," Hartridge ordered. "I won't need him any more. Then you can take your men back to Cartersburg, Mullaney. You're all done—for awhile."

"Giving up, Chief?"

Hartridge stared coldly at the State police sergeant.

"Did I ever give up a case?" he demanded in steely tones. "All I want for this one is a long life—but whether *I* live or not, Karl Tarig will pay the penalty for this!"

"You mean you can get a guy that's disappeared without a trace, and taken the witnesses with him?"

"He's as good as on the autopsy table at the Death House now," Hartridge snapped.

CHAPTER IV

Oblivion

TO Karl Tarig it seemed but a moment until he was opening his eyes again. He started violently, with the memory of his wild panic still fresh upon him, but instead of the pounding on the laboratory door, all he heard was the dull crash as the baled platinum sheets rolled off his lap onto the floor. Even in his blind fright his greed had not left him. Unconsciously he had grabbed up the loot as he had reached for the switch.

Then, in the distance, he heard the *tap-tap-tapping* of a mild gong. That was puzzling. There never had been a gong in the laboratory. And then, he realized with a start that there should be *no* laboratory, nor any Accelerator. That all blew up after he left. He should be out in the grass, with only some tumbled-down stone walls around.

Yet the laboratory was still there, and it was summer, with bright sunshine streaming through the windows. Except that the work benches were all

gone, and in their places squatted many flat-topped glass cases filled with small objects. The place looked like a museum! And it seemed very quiet and deserted.

He glanced upward and noticed the canopy of the quartzite ovoid tube was gone. There was nothing above him. Instead of sitting on the throne-like seat of the Accelerator, he was perched on top a pedestal stool with a springy seat. It stood on a dais, two steps higher than the rest of the room, and was set off by silken ropes hung from bright brass stanchions.

There was a sign swing from the ropes just where the steps led up, but its back side was to him and he did not know what it said. But somehow he had the uneasy feeling that he was spotted there as an exhibit — like a strange fish at the aquarium, or some oddity in an art gallery.

Tarig sprang to his feet, and as he did so, the strange tapping of the far-off bell ceased. Then the seat had sprung up and slapped him from behind. He turned and pushed it down. The bell began to ring again!

Sweat rolled from Tarig's face, and his hand shook a little. He let the seat go—the bell stopped. He jabbed it down—the bell rang again. There was a hookup here! It scared him. He felt like an animal in a trap.

He plunged forward for the steps, but banged into something he could not see. It struck him hard, and nearly knocked him out. Dazed, he put out a hand—and came up against a smooth, slick plane, hard and invisible. He was glazed in with a glass he could not see!

Savagely and with a despairing gulp, Tarig swung the heavy platinum bundle crashingly into the invisible but all too tangible barrier. Nothing happened but a swift, relentless rebound that tore the bundle from his grasp. He flung himself forward again, and groped. He was enclosed on two sides by the baffling screen. It stopped only at the stone walls behind him.

Tarig whirled and looked at them, hoping for the window he knew was not there. Then real panic seized him, a panic that made his former fears seem like mere queasiness. Staring him in the face was an imposing bronze tablet, such as is erected for memorials. The shiny raised lettering on it read:

THIS MARKS THE SITE OF
THE PIONEER TIME MACHINE
CREATED BY CLAUDE MORRISON
WHO MADE
HIS FIRST SUCCESSFUL PROLONGED FLIGHT THROUGH TIME
AUGUST 1940 to NOVEMBER 1953.

UNTIL THE APPEARANCE HERE OF
THE MURDERER KARL TARIG,
A FUGITIVE FROM THE YEAR
1940, THIS SPACE IS RESERVED
FROM THE PUBLIC.

Trapped!

Tarig's blood froze in his veins as he read those awful words. 1953! It must be after 1953, then. He had overshot his mark by at least four years. Ellen had come out before him . . . she must have turned him in, the wench! He should have killed her, too. He should have known you couldn't trust a woman! But Morrison? "Successful . . . flight," the tablet said. How could the scientist have lived? In his frenzy Tarig wheeled, wild-eyed.

A BENT old man, leaning on a stick, was looking at him. It was a mildly curious look, and unafraid, as one looks at a queer beetle stuck on a card. The old fellow had on a blue-gray uniform, such as museum guards wear. Tarig floundered against the unseen glass, blustering and bellowing, demanding to be let out. The old man

wagged his head from side to side, and Tarig saw his mouthings, but through the mysterious barrier his feeble voice could not be heard.

"Don't go away, you old fool," roared Tarig, as the old fellow turned and shuffled off. "I won't hurt you. Let me out, I tell you, and I will pay you . . ."

But the old man ambled across the room and seated himself in an easy chair that Tarig had not noticed. And there he sat, calmly staring at the imprisoned murderer. Then a quiet grin spread across the aged features, and the old man folded his hands placidly on his skinny lap.

"Chuckle, damn you!" screamed the raging Tarig, beating at the plates he could not see. "You won't chuckle long after I—"

The door opened. Two grim-looking men, dressed exactly alike in kilted garments, stepped into the room. They wore shining metal breastplates and close-fitting steel helmets on whose crests were embossed golden eagles. Each carried a small baton with a silver knob at the end. One unlocked a metal case that hung on the wall, and pulled a switch inside. The other was standing at the foot of the steps, staring hard at Tarig. Karl Tarig knew what he was without being told—he had seen the breed before. The clothes were different, but the man was a cop—a cop of the future!

"All right, Mister, step down. The detention screen is cut. Now take it easy, because we wouldn't want to hurt you."

Tarig was as if paralyzed. He could barely manage to step down.

"Outside," jerked the other, stopping to pick up the platinum.

Tarig was pushed into the back seat of what looked to be a plane without wings. The two cops climbed in front. The paralysis was spreading through Tarig's body, freezing everything but his breathing and his heart action.

"In your day, old-timer, I guess they still used handcuffs. To save you time, I can tell you there's no way to wiggle out from under a clamp-ray. Shoot, George."

George shot. At back-whipping acceleration George sent the machine up at a fifty-degree angle, zipping through the breeze at a flat four hundred. From that moment, neither officer cast a backward glance at the prisoner. Cringing with fright, Tarig hardly saw the gorgeously landscaped countryside beneath them, or was aware when they slid down in a long dive over the outlying clusters of skyscraper mansions that skirted the great city.

It was a scant ten minutes before the machine slid to an effortless stop on the roof of some great building. Swiftly they hustled the prisoner out and into an elevator. The elevator dropped like a plummet, and the next thing Tarig knew he was being led up the aisle of an immense courtroom.

Before him, behind a raised desk, sat five solemn judges, their somber garments in strange contrast with the white and gilt of the spotless chamber. The judge in the center rose.

"Karl Tarig, you have been convicted of a number of heinous offenses . . ."

Convicted! It was but an hour or so, it seemed, since they were committed!

". . . . but before sentence is pronounced, you are entitled to know the case against you. The Chief of National Safety, Hartridge — step forward, please."

Tarig winced. He had known Hartridge from his own past criminal career.

BUT he was due for another shock. The tall, austere man who confronted him might have been Hartridge's

father, but never Hartridge. He was slightly bent, and his hair was very white.

"Tarig," began Hartridge, "you thought you were clever, but in all my career I never saw a more stupid crime, or a more futile attempt at a getaway. As it is, the evidence against you is overwhelming, and apprehending you was child's play."

"H-how?" stammered Tarig, utterly bewildered. His scheme had been so perfect!

"Your first error was in overlooking the small model machine. That enabled Dr. Morrison to send us a warning note, which arrived the next day. From that we learned of your threats to Miss Warren—another error. Your bloodthirstiness was still worse. In approximately ten minutes, we will execute you for the murder of Higgins."

"But I didn't!" screamed Tarig. Then, more defiantly, "You can't prove it—no living human . . ."

"We *have* proved it," said Hartridge quietly. He looked coldly at the prisoner, then went relentlessly on.

"We knew from the time given and the characteristics of the machine that Miss Warren would materialize first. And about when. Nine years after that fatal night, we set up a field headquarters at the scene of the crime and waited. It was not until two years after that, that she appeared, indicating the force of the Accelerator was greater than its inventor knew.

"From that circumstance, we judged it would be another two years before we could recover Dr. Morrison, but when Miss Warren told us he would probably materialize in a dying condition, we took much greater precautions. With her help we located a cot at exactly the spot where the bodies had disappeared, and posted a night and day detail of doctors.

"It was well we did, for when Dr. Morrison did appear, he was bleeding profusely from the wounds you gave him . . ."

"It's a lie!" howled Tarig. "This is all a third-degree. You can't . . ."

He choked to a stop. Hartridge, stern and granite-faced, was pointing to a man and woman standing to one side. Slowly Tarig turned his eyes to them. It was Claude Morrison, entirely unchanged, regarding him gravely—and Ellen Warren clung to his arm!

"As soon as practicable," Hartridge continued with deadly evenness, "we convened court at the spot, and tried the case . . ."

"I protest," whined Tarig, much of his bluster gone. "I was absent."

"Oh, no, you were not," said Hartridge. "No prisoner in the tightest possible cell was ever so definitely nailed to three dimensions. We knew to the inch where you were. The only knowledge we lacked was when you would show yourself.

"As the machine got hotter, it exercised more force, so that we only knew that at some time hereafter you would show up—but not within years of the time when. To avoid wasting our good troopers' time in a useless vigil to catch a killer like yourself, we constructed the trap you saw. It was a very simple affair—a standing detention screen, and a spring seat that would close a circuit when your weight came on it as you materialized. That circuit set off the gong which warned the caretaker, and also rang alarms in all the nearby police stations.

"It is your privilege now to hear a transcript of the testimony, if you so wish," Hartridge concluded.

Tarig looked at the sad eyes of Claude Morrison and the horror-filled ones of the girl, now grown into mature womanhood—the girl he had meant to

ruin. He shuddered, and hung his head abjectly.

"Skip it," he muttered.

"It is not pleasant," remarked Hartridge dryly. He looked at the miserable, quailing figure before him with some disgust. "It is now ten years since the trial. I am an old man and ready to retire, and I am glad to say that your appearance closes the last open file on my desk."

"Take him away," somebody said, and dazed and bewildered Tarig found himself being led toward a black door marked only by a single white death's-head. It was the execution chamber of 1963!

He died, not knowing that Dr. Claude Morrison and Ellen Warren, after waiting all these years for his reappearance, would be married next day. He died twenty-three years after his last crimes, but to Karl Tarig it was only two or three hours later.

All he knew was that he died horribly because his mental anguish was indescribable. And yet there was no physical pain.

In that little gray room whose portal was the ominous black door, Karl Tarig was left all alone. There was a little chair over in a corner. Tarig slumped onto it, burying his head in his hands.

Presently he was aware of laughter, and then of an illuminated screen on the far wall as a motion picture film came to life. It was a happy picture—a scene at a ball game, with thousands of people roaring to the antics of two baseball clowns, while their teammates stood around, grinning.

Tarig groaned at the sight. Baseball had been one of the few things he took actual pleasure in . . .

The scene shifted then. This time there was a large restaurant, with couples dancing and waiters hurrying to the tables with trays of delicacies.

Tarig groaned again, and his stomach felt all hollow inside. The few times in his life that he had had money, he had splurged it on sumptuous dining . . .

The film flashed a new scene. It was a brilliant day, and under a cloudless sky sleek thoroughbred horses were racing for money and turf honors. Many thousands of gaily dressed people crowded the grandstand, while hundreds placed their bets in the pari-mutuel machines. Across from the grandstand the totalizator board chalked up the payoff for a 12-to-1 shot in the previous handicap.

Tarig shuddered all over. But when the solemn voice came through the concealed loudspeaker, he broke out in a cold sweat.

"Karl Tarig," intoned that voice. "These are the pleasures of the outside world. These are the pleasures to which you are here denied, now and forevermore. You alone determined that you would break the laws of humanity; you alone decided that common decency and honest toil were for 'suckers,' as you once so loudly—and so foolishly—boasted. But you, Karl Tarig, are the sucker . . ."

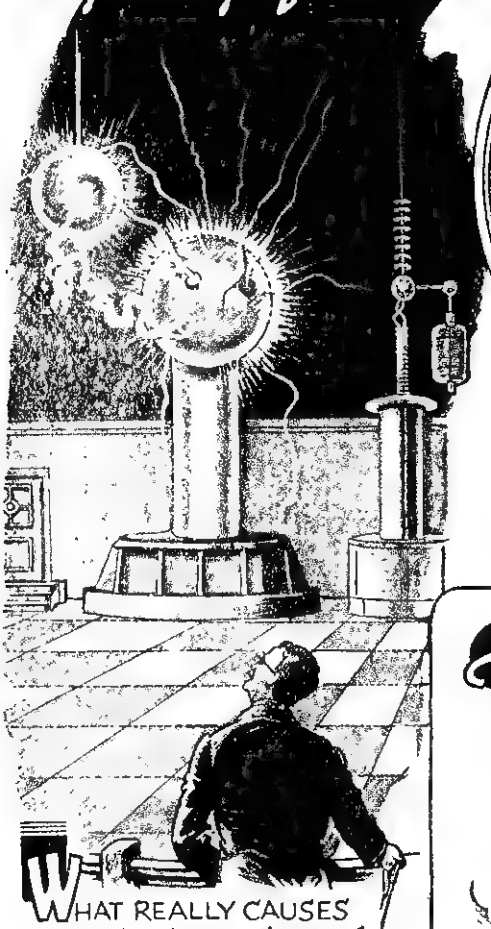
"Stop!" Tarig screamed, rushing to the little black door and smashing his fists against the unyielding steel. "Stop, I can't stand it any longer! I was a fool . . . I'll never do it again . . . Oh God, give me just one more chance, please give me—*Ohhhh!*"

The little gray room was suddenly alive with a network of crackling electricity. Into every corner the sizzling white barbs reached. They enfolded Karl Tarig in deathly embrace.

Moments later the lightning ceased. The little door was jerked open by a bored guard, who knew he would see nothing. He did sneeze, however, when the draft of the opened door swirled a little mite of gray dust into the air.

RIDDLES OF SCIENCE

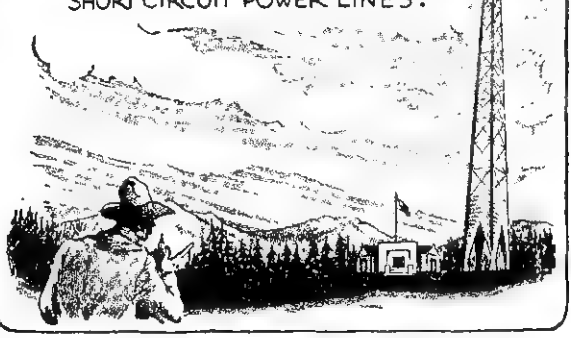
Mystery of the Sunspots



PERIODICALLY, OUR **SUN** DEVELOPS A RASH OF **SPOTS** ON ITS FACE WHICH SCIENTISTS SAY CAUSE GREAT **MAGNETIC STORMS** . .

WHAT REALLY CAUSES THESE **GREAT STORMS** ON THE **SUN** ? IS IT A BREAKDOWN OF **ATOMS** IN THE SUN? DOES THE ANSWER THE **ATOMS SMASHERS** ARE SEEKING LIE HERE?

THESE **STORMS** CAN BECOME SO INTENSE, CROSSING 93 MILLION MILES OF SPACE, AS TO **DISRUPT** RADIO COMMUNICATION, TELEGRAPH SERVICE, AND EVEN SHORT CIRCUIT POWER LINES.



WHAT really causes sunspots? Science would be very much interested in discovering the answer to this mystery. The sun is the powerhouse of the solar system. Within its bulk enormous energies are fostered. Are they so tremendous that the secret of atomic disruption could be answered by a study of sunspots? Are sunspots vast explosions caused by the breakdown of atoms inside the sun, and the release of tremendous storms of energy that are capable of crossing 93 millions of miles of space to Earth? Scientists seek the answer, because it may mean a great advance in civilization.

MYSTERY OF THE MIND MACHINE

BY DON WILCOX

Not only could this machine read minds—it could read the future!

"THE usual order, Miss White?" asked the brisk young pharmacist.

The girl answered with a nod, a flick of her pretty eyelashes, and a smile that was at once generous and mysterious. Bill Taylor told himself that he should get better acquainted.

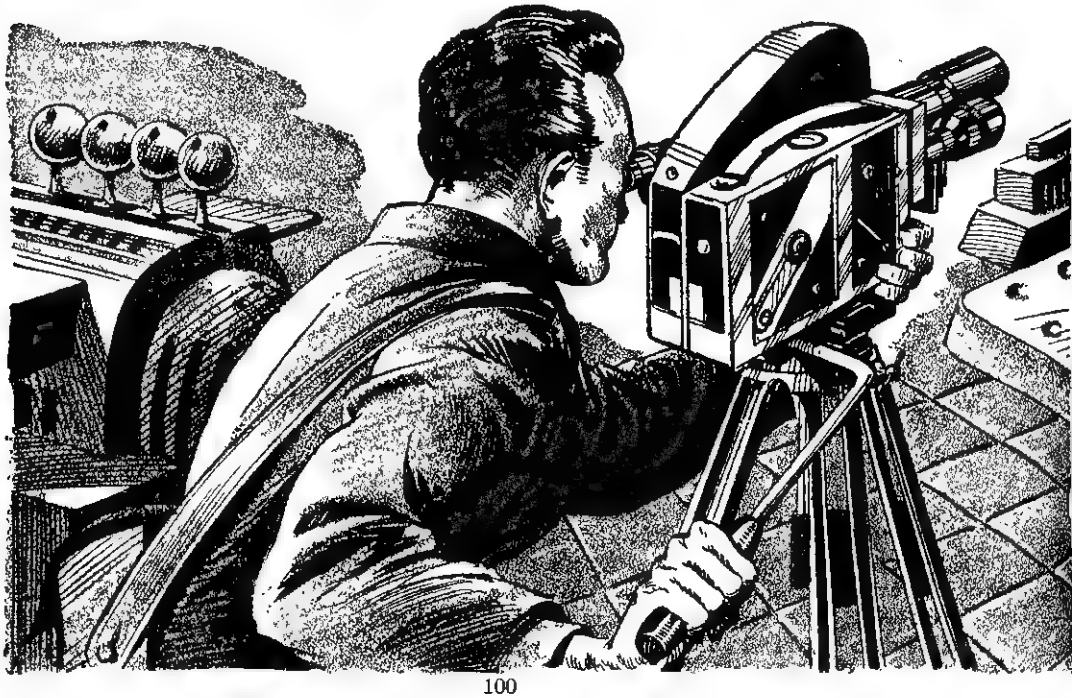
Then Maurine White's expression changed. A heavy-jawed man came up to stand beside her, and the frozen squint of his right eye upon her made her shrink.

Bill Taylor had seen the squint-eyed man before. He recognized the pocket-soiled purple paper that the big man passed across the prescription counter with a brusque:

"Here—and make it snappy!"

"Like a flash!" Bill Taylor answered, with mental reservations.

Both of these orders were as clear in Bill Taylor's mind as H_2O. Neither was anything any physician had ever prescribed. The one on the purple paper was a curious mixture of powdered soaps and powdered metals. What its purpose might be was an unsolved formula among Bill Taylor's mental storehouse of mysteries. If he ever got



Laubmann ground away with his camera as the secret was revealed in the bubble

to be a secret service officer, he'd look into things like this. To be a U. S. secret service officer was Bill Taylor's secret ambition.

The young pharmacist went into the prescription room and began work on the two orders. Then he stopped and listened, and his lips tightened.

"You work for that high-powered artist, Steinbock, don't you?" the squint-eyed man said in a tone that was more accusation than question.

"I'm his pupil," the girl replied, tapping her fingers on the counter.

Her nervous mannerism did not escape Bill Taylor's observing eye. Through the small prescription window he watched with interest. In his mental storehouse of mysteries this lovely girl occupied an important niche. Why did she shy away from discussing the master artist, Steinbock, with whom she worked?

The big squint-eyed man put his questions bluntly.

"Tell me, where does Steinbock get this new yellowish coloring material that the art critics rave about?"

"No one seems to know." The girl's cryptic answer was meant to be final. The glossy black hair that floated over her shoulders shook uncomfortably.

"Of course you wouldn't tell, even if you knew," the squint-eyed man sneered. He edged closer to her. "Is the old devil as bad as they say he is?"

Maurine White preferred not to hear.

"Is he?"

"What do you mean?"

"You know what the newspapers say! Steinbock's a temperamental demon who chases around the country spouting off about art and insulting everybody's tastes—"

"They buy his pictures," said the girl staunchly.

"Since he invented that new color—*yes!* But how do you put up with his nasty temper?"

Maurine White's face flushed with rage. Bill Taylor dashed back to the counter, his eyes ablaze, his fists doubled white.

"Laubmann!"

The big man turned sharply, surprised at being called by name. He had never given the young pharmacist a second look before. What he saw now was snapping blue eyes, straight athletic build, doubled fists trembling slightly at the sides of the youngster's apron.

"What's the matter here?" Taylor barked.

The squint-eyed man seemed lost for an answer. He snarled something unintelligible, but the young pharmacist cut him off.

"You can wait over in that refreshment booth by the wall. I'll call you when your order's ready."

LAUBMANN backed away and seated himself with a glower. But a moment later when Bill Taylor had returned to his work, the big man sauntered back to the prescription counter and resumed his talk in a low confidential tone.

"Listen, beautiful, I happen to know that this million-dollar yellow pigment, whatever it is, has got the art boys all standing up on their hind legs hollering. And I'll bet a grand that you, young lady, know exactly what that yellow's made of.

"Why don't you get wise to yourself? You don't have to lick old Steinbock's dirty boots all your life. Cut in on it and make yourself a wad of dough, before it's too late. I'll make you an offer right here and now. You dig up the secret for me and I'll—"

"No, thanks! Why? Are you an artist?"

The big man grinned. "In my line

—yes. When I see a million dollars running around loose, you're damned right I'm an artist! If one stroke don't do it, another will. For the last time, are you in with me or out?"

Laubmann lit a cigarette while he waited for an answer. He didn't see the exchange of glances that passed through the window of the prescription room.

"Out," said the girl sharply.

Laubmann laughed coldly. "I can't figure what kind of a choke hold that devil Steinbock has got on you. . . . But I've got a very neat way of finding out—a little trick of science—and when I do, that'll be all I need." He muttered, as if to himself, " 'Fascinello, the million dollar yellow.' That's what he calls it."

A moment later the blond young pharmacist returned to the counter.

"Here's your order, *Mr.* Laubmann."

The squint-eyed man took the large package and paid for it; then he shot a glance at the coin in the girl's hand. He flung down another coin. Then with a quick movement he snatched the smaller package that Bill Taylor was handing to the girl.

"Wait! That's not yours," Taylor snapped.

"Make her up another!" the squint-eyed man snarled. "*I'll* take this one!"

"Here! You can't—"

"Can't I? Why not? I paid for it!"

Laubmann's heavy arm flew out to hurl the pharmacist back against the steel counter. Then the big man made a swift exit by a side door.

Maurine White caught her breath, but before she could cry for help, Bill Taylor's hand cupped over her mouth.

"Let him go!" Taylor snapped.

"But—but he's got my—" she choked.

"Nothing of the sort," the pharmacist retorted. "All he got was a package of pure sulphur."

"But my order—"

"I'll make up another one," Taylor said hastily. He smiled reassuringly. "Wait in a booth for me. I'll be off in ten minutes, if the old man gets back from dinner when he should."

By the time the girl and the pharmacist faced each other over sandwiches and coffee in a little lunchroom down the street, the neon lights were flashing outside and headlights of cars were swishing by. It was after seven.

"I didn't finish getting your order ready," said Taylor, munching a double decker. "But I just had to speak to you."

Maurine blushed. "We'll forget the order for tonight," she said. "That will be safest."

TAYLOR grinned. "I had a hunch that bird might try some strong-arm stuff after you gave him the cold shoulder. So I fixed up a substitute package."

"He certainly fell for it," the girl laughed nervously. "Gee, but I was scared! Look, I'm still trembling." She lifted her hand. "Won't be able to paint tonight."

"You work nights much?" Taylor asked her.

"It's the best time," Maurine answered. "Professor Steinbock has a lecture most every night, and that leaves me free to paint as I please. Tonight he's to broadcast from some private station out in the country owned by an art and science cult."

Taylor pushed his chair back. "How about a movie?"

"Oh, I haven't been for ages," the girl said.

As they stood by the curb waiting for a taxi to come up, Taylor noticed that the girl kept glancing apprehensively at the half-lighted street around

her.

"You're still nervous about Laubmann?" he asked, hiding his own personal anxiety in a show of nonchalance. "Don't worry. That sulphur threw him off the trail, as far as you're concerned. Of course, he might try his bluff on Steinbock. He acts like one of these rough-shod racketeers that takes long chances."

"Professor Steinbock would kill him." The girl spoke matter of factly. Then as if regretting her remark, she added, "That is, I mean—figuratively. Mr. Taylor—I mean Bill—there's something I've got to talk over with you."

"There's something I want to ask you, too," he said. A taxi stopped beside them and they got in. Taylor gave an order to the driver, and the lights of show windows began to stream past.

"Maurine," he resumed, "is there any truth in what Laubmann hinted at—that you have to put up with Steinbock?"

Somberly the girl gazed at the passing lights, and Bill Taylor wondered what mental images might be passing through her mind's eye. If she had intended to confide in him, his abrupt question had changed her mind.

"I'm sorry I asked," he said. "We've put our worries aside for the evening, haven't we?"

Maurine White gave one of her mysterious smiles and nodded.

Taylor took her hand wordlessly and all troubles and worries seemed very far away. . . .

Moments later the taxi drew close to a curb and the front door swung open. A big man bounded into the front seat and the taxi sped on. It all happened so quickly that when Taylor realized the spot they were in, it was too late.

"Good work, Handy," said the new passenger. His back was toward the windshield, his half-concealed revolver menaced the two wide-eyed occupants in the rear seat. Each passing light revealed the frozen squint of the intruder's right eye.

"Head west," Laubmann ordered. "Time's getting short."

"Okay, boss," the driver replied. "Worked smooth as silk, didn't it?"

CHAPTER II

Skulduggery

THE car rolled along at a brisk pace, heading west through the city.

"Who's the fellow?" the driver asked.

"Pharmacist," Laubmann answered. "Still wet behind the ears."

"The one that gave you the sulphur?" Handy said skeptically.

"Yeah," the big man grunted. "But he's harmless."

"You don't think he knows—"

"Hell no. He's just a fresh guy making a play for Miss Beautiful. Wanted to make a big impression on the girl, so he fixed up that fake package. Kid stuff. Well, nothing to do but bring him along."

The car opened up on the main highway northwest and the miles flew by.

"Pick out a side road, Handy," Laubmann ordered.

The driver followed along a dirt road. Halfway around a section, at a safe distance from the lights of farm houses, the taxi halted. Laubmann handled his gun with skill, and neither the girl nor Taylor ventured to defy it. As Handy finished knotting the ropes around Taylor's wrists and ankles, the big man barked his final threats.

"You're not going to say anything about this, Mr. Smart Pants, see? Maybe you know what's up and maybe you

don't. But by the time you wriggle a half mile up the road to that farm house, it'll all be over. We're not going to harm the girl *unless* someone starts throwing monkey wrenches. Don't let it be you, see?"

Laubmann stood by the front door of the car, keeping an eye on Maurine, who was still in the back seat.

"Shall I kick him in the mouth a couple times?" Handy asked, giving a final jerk to Taylor's knots.

"I'll do any kicking around," Laubmann snapped. "Slap some tape over his mouth. We've got to beat it."

Two minutes later the taxi rumbled away, and with it Maurine White and her two captors.

Bill Taylor was left to struggle angrily at his ropes. He cursed himself for a fool, to have been caught this easily. He began then to wriggle along the road. Where would they take Maurine? What tortures might they inflict in an effort to extort a million-dollar secret from her?

A vague clue tugged at Taylor's mind: the recent orders of powdered soaps and metal dusts Laubmann had been handing in. Perhaps—

Car lights were coming now. Taylor twisted and wrenched and squirmed, confident that he would attract attention as soon as the car drew close. But suddenly the edge of the graded shoulder slipped from under him and he went rolling down the soft dirt embankment. The car passed. Only darkness and hopelessness were left.

But Bill Taylor's mind was aflame now, and he stopped his senseless struggle as if to ration his energies. The stubble of mown weeds was beneath him. He edged along until his hands, bound behind him, found the sharp thick stub of a sunflower stalk. It prodded stubbornly, like a knife blade. His wrists maneuvered against it and the knot began to give.

Five minutes later Taylor raced into a farmyard and breathlessly sketched his plight. Six minutes later the farmer deposited him at the nearest highway filling station. Bill Taylor dashed to the telephone. Soon the drug store proprietor was on the other end of the line.

"What is it, Taylor? The address for the original registration of— Sure, just a minute. Read me that prescription number again, will you? Okay, hold the wire while Johnny looks it up." Johnny was the proprietor's son.

TAYLOR drummed his fingers impatiently, wondered if this would prove a wild-goose chase. It had been two years or more since the first order for the powdered soaps and metals had come in, but he still remembered the registration number. He knew, too, that the little wizened old scientist who had originally called for that formula was dead.

So much more the mystery that this new customer, Laubmann, should call for it again during these recent weeks. But perhaps the address of the deceased scientist would be the address of Laubmann. A faint hope, and yet it had to be tracked down.

"By the way, Bill," came the boss' voice over the wire, "you've got a special delivery from the U. S. secret service—"

"Open it!" Taylor begged. "Read it to me!"

"Okay . . . 'Dear Mr. Taylor: We regret to inform you that—' "

"That's enough," Taylor mumbled. There was a short silence. So that was that—his secret ambition dashed to bits.

Taylor's boss added, "It goes on to say that they're making only ten appointments in your division, and your

number was twelve. It's signed by Penniworth, Chief. Sorry, Bill . . . Of course, I'm glad not to lose you."

"Okay," said Taylor with stung pride. "Have you got that address?"

"What's the matter, Bill? In a jam or something? You sound nervous."

"I—I'm all right."

"Here . . . Greenwood Village, Rural Route Two, Mail Box Ten."

"Thanks, Mr. Dunnigan." Bill Taylor clicked the receiver, and dashed out of the gas station. A taxi had pulled up to the pumps a moment before, and the driver was drawing sleepily on a cigarette.

Bill Taylor jumped in and snapped an order.

"Greenwood Village, and make it greased lightning!"

They roared down the highway, wide open.

"Greenwood Village is a popular place tonight," the driver remarked *over his shoulder. "I just come from* there."

Taylor studied the driver's face. It was a plain face, as faces go, and honest enough to be believed. A touch of pride played over the countenance as the driver elaborated on his recent adventure.

"I just got through takin' a world-famous artist over there—that is, to a spot a few miles beyond."

"Rural Route Two, Box Ten?" Taylor asked eagerly.

"Yeah. I reckon you know the place. It's where they used to have a sort of science colony before old Professor Tannenbaum died. Last two years the place has had a kind of dead look to it, the few times I've passed, though I s'pose there's a caretaker, maybe. But it sure surprised me to hear that this artist Steinbock was going out there to lecture on a private radio hook-up. He said he had to be there by nine."

"Much of a crowd there?"

The driver shook his head. "No crowd at all. That's what made Steinbock mad the minute we pulled up. He fairly pawed the earth."

The speedometer eased downward from seventy-five to forty. They rounded the corner through Greenwood Village, and the indicator climbed upward again as they struck out over a dirt road.

"Pretty sore, was he?"

"Steinbock? Hell, he almost made me take him back then and there! But the big fellow that came out to meet him brushed his fur down by tellin' him the science club members had a kind of sentiment about listening over their private telephone hook-ups, in memory of old Professor Tannenbaum. I s'pose they know what they're doing."

The driver burned up the road for another two minutes and then cut his speed.

"Cut off your lights," Taylor ordered, "and keep your motor quiet."

FORTUNATELY the taxi driver was coöperative. Bill Taylor put a few sharp questions to him as they eased up to a sheltered nook out of view of the driveway. No, the driver hadn't seen anything of a girl. He hadn't seen anyone, in fact, except the big squint-eyed man and the artist. And he hadn't waited for the artist, for the big man had insisted he would drive Steinbock home himself.

"Wait for me," said Bill Taylor, getting out.

"Be back in an hour or so?" the driver asked.

"Whether it's one hour or ten, wait for me. This is important."

Taylor made his way up the driveway. Under the starlight the huge old country mansion was a mass of chalky

white stone outlined vaguely against a black hillside.

Swish-swish-swish. . . . The grass that grew up between the flat stones of the driveway brushed Taylor's shoes with every step. The outline of the castle-like structure grew a little clearer. A few points of light were visible—coppery rays that were reflected starlight on coppery chimney ornaments and turret tops. Dim blue and green lights shone from the inside, leaking through breaks in the sagging shutters.

Taylor paused at the door of a basement garage. The taxi which Maurine and he had so fatefully entered was doubtless behind that locked door.

He walked around the mansion swiftly and studied the lights and sounds. The drone of the broadcast lecture was the only hint of activity; but Bill Taylor felt in his bones that somewhere within that castle Maurine White—if she was still alive—was a prisoner.

The windows were too high to admit a search. Taylor looked for a ladder, but contented himself with a sturdy latticed frame that stood by a side door, half covered with dead vines. He jerked it from its moorings and made the rounds of those windows from which light escaped.

Maurine was not to be seen in the rooms of the lower floor. Perhaps she was in a basement room; or possibly she was waiting in one of those second floor chambers from which ghastly, dim green light floated out into the blackness.

The main floor activities proved that Laubmann was working an elaborate hoax upon Steinbock. Through a sizable gap in the shutters Bill Taylor could see the big open living room and the three persons in it—Laubmann, Handy and their unsuspecting artist guest.

The fireplace was aglow with a rhythmic flicker of red and yellow: an electrical imitation of live coals. The old-fashioned wood panels of the lofty walls glowed softly with illuminated clusters of red tulips.

Laubmann stood in the farther corner of the room with a surly grin on his face, and beside him was Handy, now dressed as a servant. They whispered inaudibly. Their silent ridicule was centered on the artist Steinbock.

The famous intellectual was seated so that he could not see them. His attention was focused upon the microphone which gleamed brilliantly under the glow of the desk light.

STEINBOCK was talking furiously. There were notes on his desk that his bony fingers kept sorting energetically, but plainly his notes couldn't keep pace with his verbal acrobatics. His pointed face was etched sharply against the desk light. His shaggy yellowish-white locks of hair and his crisp mustaches and goatee waggled imperiously in sharp gestures. His coppery wrinkles seemed to ripple with a proud hatred as he spewed forth his caustic words.

"So you think you'll learn all about art by having the world's famed artists give you radio speeches! Bah! Who are you? You call yourselves a secret society! Why didn't you come here tonight and show your faces? Why didn't you come and buy some pictures, if you wanted to learn about art? You ignorant numbskulls! You're the ones that are cheated, not me!"

Bill Taylor listened uncomfortably, for he had noticed that the wires from the microphone simply ran across the floor into an adjoining room, and there they hung over the window sill. On his side of the open window the loose ends

stuck out—*attached to nothing!*

"I suppose you have old masters on your walls! Jerk them down and throw them in the ashcan. Old masters! Oh, I know you—and all the yowling, cultured tomcats of your breed! Any old master could throw mud in a snake's eye, and if the books told you it was 'art,' you'd frame it and rave about it and call it beautiful—"

While the artist's tirade ensued, Bill Taylor acted. The more violent the words, the less danger that Taylor's entrance would be heard. He pushed the window up cautiously and drew his weight up over the sill.

Time was short, he knew. The taxi driver had told him that Steinbock would talk for an hour, beginning at nine. Now it was five minutes to ten. Five minutes in which to locate Maurine!

Footsteps sounded from the large living room. Taylor tiptoed toward the darkest corner and waited. The steps ceased. All the while Steinbock's vituperations showered down like a verbal blowtorch. And all to an audience that didn't exist, Taylor thought. But it was one sure way to coax the artist out to this lonely spot, and to loosen up his tongue. However, what further plans Laubmann might have for extracting a secret from him, the young pharmacist could not guess. . . .

Taylor discovered that this room was a sort of side hallway, with a narrow back stairs in the dark corner. The footsteps came again, now with decision, moving in his direction. He barely had time to duck under the narrow stairway.

Suddenly Handy stood in the center of the half-lighted room. In a moment Laubmann was beside him. Steinbock's lecture continued in the distance.

"What's up?" Laubmann whispered.

"Thought I heard something," said Handy.

"Probably the girl."

"Maybe." Handy looked around suspiciously.

"Was she all right when you took the gag off of her?"

"Mad enough to bite," Handy replied. "I told her if she screamed, I'd come up and brain her."

Laubmann grunted, "This old dubber is going strong. That drink loosened him up just right. But getting him under the machine isn't going to be easy. We've got to keep our talk as smooth as oil. So long as we can keep him interested in art, he's practically putty in our hands."

Handy asked, "What you going to tell him about the machine?"

"I'll give him that line we doped out—the society members want some scientific data on his temperament."

HANDY looked around uneasily toward the deep shadows.

"I still think I heard something in here."

Laubmann retorted in a harsh whisper, "Don't get started with your jitters again. Remember, it's tonight or never. Next week the purchasers will move this science equipment all out, and somebody will wake up to the fact that the caretaker of this house is a minus quantity, and there'll be a search for his body."

Bill Taylor's heart pounded so loudly, he thought it would give him away. Evidently these two thugs had simply murdered their way into a temporary possession of this place.

Laubmann was whispering, "So keep a firm grip on your gun, and I'll make those machines reach right out and rake in that million on a silver platter."

"Okay," Handy grumbled. "But while I'm at it, I may as well take a look under this stairway."

CHAPTER III

Recalled to Life

THE pudgy counterfeit servant drew himself up uncomfortably in his oversize dress suit, took his revolver from his coat pocket, and plodded toward the darkened corner under the narrow stairs.

"Listen!" Laubmann hissed suddenly. His assistant stopped. From the living room the master artist's radio speech was coming to a close.

"I see that my time is up," Steinbock's final words sounded, "and if you're as ignorant as most art lovers" —there was bitter sarcasm in his tone to the last—"all that I've said won't scratch the surface of your boorish mentalities. That's all. Steinbock signing off."

During the last hateful echo Laubmann hastily whispered to Handy, "Take him in hand and keep the show going. I'll take the mike."

The men slipped back to the broadcasting room. The next moment Laubmann was shouting glibly into the dead microphone to his imaginary brothers of the secret science club, while Handy was loading the perspiring Steinbock down with handshakes and laudatory whispers.

Bill Taylor's heart thumped boldly. He clambered up the narrow stairs as swiftly and silently as he could. The steps were cushioned with dust, and dust fell on the back of Taylor's hand as he turned the knob at the head of the stairs. Obviously this ascent was not often used.

At first the upstairs room seemed solid black, and Taylor groped against obstructions on every hand. The place was packed with old furniture and junk. A faint gleam of light urged him on. There was no way around, under or through. Taylor padded over the tops of things like a cat.

"Maurine!" he called in a hoarse whisper.

No one answered. He blundered on. The storeroom proved to be L-shaped. When he got past the corner he could see to the opening beyond. Thirty feet or more ahead, beyond the scantily curtained archway, was a spacious green-lighted room. The sight that he glimpsed in that room made him catch his breath.

He was not sure *what* the sight was —only that it was something wonderful and gleaming and mysterious, scientific apparatus of incredible complexity. That much he could tell at a glance, and there was no time for more than a glance. He must find the girl and get her out of here before the rest moved upstairs.

"Maurine!" he called again in a penetrating whisper.

"Bill?" came a faint answer from somewhere ahead. "Bill—"

Bill Taylor crashed recklessly over a heap of chairs, vaulted a barrier of bookcases and dressers. Then, within ten feet of the curtained arch that led into the big green room, he stopped and called again.

"Maurine!"

"Here I am." The dim whisper seemed somewhere back of him.

"Where?"

"Here. Locked in a supply closet."

The whisper seemed to come from the wall. It was too dark to see ventilator shafts or speaking tubes, if there were any; but Taylor made certain that the door on which the girl was now rapping could not be reached from this room.

He scrambled forward toward the curtained arch, but suddenly the green room blazed up with dazzling white ceiling lights.

"Careful," came the girl's faint whisper. "Don't take any chances."

WHEREVER she was, thought Bill, she must have seen those lights go on. She was evidently hidden somewhere within view of the big green-walled science room. Again he started for the archway, but the sound of footsteps bounding up a stairs forestalled him.

The footsteps were Handy's. Taylor couldn't see him, but the man's voice carried through the rooms.

"Cut out that rapping!" he growled. "We're bringing Steinbock up, and it won't be healthy for him to know you're here."

"Let me out!" the girl demanded.

"Got a formula for us?"

"No."

"Then pipe down."

"You can't get away with this!"

"Can't, huh? You don't know me and Laubmann. One of you has got what we want—either you or Steinbock, and we've got a machine that'll reach right into your brains and get it. So take it easy!"

"I don't believe you! You sound insane."

"Quiet!"

"Let me out!" the girl demanded.

"You don't want Steinbock to know you're here, do you?" Handy threatened. Maurine White didn't answer.

"You're afraid of him," Handy taunted. The girl remained silent. "Okay. Just remember whatever *he's* got on you, we can get on you too, with this machine."

Handy's threats hissed into silence. The boisterous voices and footsteps of the other two men were already near the top of the stairs that the erstwhile taxi driver had ascended a moment earlier.

Bill Taylor dropped flat on the dust-covered surface of a library table. He held back a cough, but the chills that played through his spine wouldn't be suppressed. Those chills weren't fear for himself. They were anxiety for the unknown turn that this strange affair might take in the midst of these scientific instruments—anxiety for Maurine White, waiting in terror behind some locked door that led off from this big science room.

Taylor considered himself well hidden. Though he could see through the flimsy curtain, the light against it would prevent their seeing him; besides, there were obstructions of furniture that cast him in shadow.

Nevertheless, he was almost close enough to the archway to swing a club at anyone who came too near the curtain—and, to his surprise, there was a club in his hand! It was a detached table leg, about the size of a baseball bat, which he had picked up involuntarily sometime during his encounter with the furniture. He lay crouched, tense, desperate.

Handy closed the door after the other two men had entered, and quietly locked it. He followed after them with his phony servant's dignity, not forgetting to keep one hand at his gun pocket.

Laubmann at once conducted the scowling Steinbock on a tour of the room. He launched into a sketchy explanation of the scientific apparatus—an explanation that Taylor knew must be faked, for Laubmann and his make-believe servant frequently exchanged cynical winks behind their guest's back.

Steinbock played the bored listener and tilted his goatee contemptuously. Nevertheless, he was impressed when Laubmann told him that the club members employed "this elaborate instrument, which is a cross between a stereoscope, a stethoscope and a telescope to

register the temperamental biographies of our famous visitors."

BILL TAYLOR whispered to himself, "Horse feathers!" But the more Laubmann talked of the thing's wonders, the more curious the young pharmacist became.

"And if you will be so kind, Mr. Steinbock, the club would be pleased to have you register a brief temperamental biography."

Laubmann's sugar-coated manner was dangerously overdone, but the famous Steinbock was habitually blinded by his own conceit. He took the chair that was built into the lower end of the instrument, and allowed Laubmann to strap his arms, shoulders and head into position.

The artist's eyes were carefully fitted into the stereoscopelike eyepiece. After a few minor adjustments were made, Laubmann pressed a lever slowly. Chair, eyepiece and the whole lower section of the instrument tilted downward.

"Comfortable?" Laubmann asked.

"I'm never comfortable in the presence of bourgeoisie or scientists," the artist growled, which was his way of answering in the affirmative. He was resting on his elbows, his head was bent downward as if he were asleep over a desk.

"What do you see?" Laubmann asked.

"Blackness. Umber. Ebony. What am I supposed to see?"

"Nothing," Laubmann soothed. "Relax, sir, and let your mind wander. We're about to begin."

Laubmann hastily snatched up some papers that had been left lying on the instrument, handed them to Handy, and motioned for him to get them out of sight. Handy brought them over to the archway, drew back the flimsy curtain, and gave them a toss. Taylor tightened his grip on his club, but the next instant the curtain fell back in place and the unsuspecting Handy was again strolling about the room with his hand at his coat pocket.

Taylor glanced down at the papers. They were typewritten notes of a scientific nature; doubtless something Professor Tannenbaum had once written, for the paper bore his letterhead. The single phrase that caught Taylor's interest was THE IMAGE PROJECTOR. Wherever that phrase occurred, it was capitalized.

Pwoof! The airy, puffy sound caught the pharmacist's attention. He stared at the upper end of the long instrument, or rather series of instruments that were pieced together through the length of the room.

What he saw was Laubmann standing on a chair, pouring the package of familiar soap and metal powders into a spherical receptacle at the top of a standard. The air fogged with a puff of silvery dust as the last of the package was emptied.

Then Handy snapped off the white lights, and only the dim green glow of the indirect lighting system illuminated the room. Laubmann touched a switch; and a motor somewhere below the silvery receptacle clicked on and settled into an almost inaudible hum.

At once strange things began to happen. Taylor's eyes widened, he relaxed his grip on the club, his gaze swept back and forth from one end of the room to the other, as he tried to catch all that was taking place.

The powders from the silvery receptacle began to sift down through a series of crystal blowers, and their fine sprays shot through an hour-glass shaped vessel, where they were lost from view by surrounding mechanisms. At the same time a tiny bubble appeared from an

opening in a long straight tube that extended along the floor.

AT first Taylor thought the bubble indicated a leak in the system of connections between the two ends of the apparatus. But as the bubble continued to grow, he saw that Laubmann and Handy watched it with appreciative interest. They moved about cautiously, lest the current of air disturb it. It was now as large as a basket ball —and still growing.

Steinbock, who could see nothing, grew impatient for something to happen.

"I'm getting some questions ready for you," Laubmann retorted, "and we'll start right away."

Even when the giant soap bubble had grown as big as a beach ball, it had not yet reached its limit. Finally it filled the whole center of the room, reaching almost to the ceiling. Laubmann touched a switch then and everything became stationary.

The giant bubble trembled slightly when Laubmann walked across to the lower end of the instrument where Steinbock sat suspended. It was silvery gray, and strangely it did not reflect the green of the lighted ceiling.

What it did reflect was a series of rapidly changing pictures of persons and places, all of them spinning past so indistinctly that Bill Taylor was at first only bewildered. Where were the pictures coming from? No movie ever changed forms and faces *that* swiftly!

"First," said Laubmann, resuming his sugar-coated manner, "I am sure the club members would like to know about your recollections of your early home life, Professor Steinbock."

The flitting pictures on the side of the big silvery bubble suddenly clarified in a steadier scene: that of a low rambling house among trees. The house came closer and clearer, and the gray trees disappeared. Children dressed in somber colors were playing in the yard. One of them, a boy, was a bright clear-cut figure. Another moving object was simply a shadow.

"No doubt you have pleasant memories," Laubmann continued, "of those childhood days when the family would gather around the table for dinner."

The scene instantaneously changed. Now the bubble gave forth an interior scene of the house, with the family seated at the table. The personage which showed most distinctly was the bright-looking young boy. He bore a youthful resemblance to the present famous artist. But among the other figures, Taylor noticed there was a blank, occupying the chair next to the young boy. The outline of that blank figure was much like that of the boy himself, but no features were visible.

All of the figures, including that of the blank shadowy outline, were continually in motion. Suddenly the bright young boy reached as if to slap the shadowy figure beside him—and for an instant the striking arm itself went blank.

All of this series of pictures had come so suddenly and moved so quickly that Bill Taylor was aghast. But of one thing he was fully convinced. This was no artificial movie. *It was an actual glimpse of the images passing through Steinbock's mind!*

CHAPTER IV

Mental Movies

"OF course I had a childhood," Steinbock barked angrily. "What about it?"

With the first outbreak of his agitated voice, the picture on the bubble went blank. The blank arm of that swinging slap he—as a boy—had in-

tended to make, magnified instantaneously to blot out the whole scene. A smear of violent purple flashed across the side of the bubble, then the illuminations grew vague and livid. A glimpse of Laubmann's face shot past—a distorted caricature of the coldly squinting right eye and the huge ugly jaw.

"What about it?" Steinbock sneered. "Do you want me to recite the story of my childhood for the benefit of your mysterious club?"

"That won't be necessary," Laubmann replied. "It is sufficient for you to *think* about it. The machine is able to record some of your temperamental and emotional recollections."

"I think you're cracked," Steinbock muttered, and the caricature of the squint-eyed man again crossed the bubble. "All right, what next?"

"Next I want you to recall . . ."

For several minutes Laubmann struggled with his cautious questioning, trying hard to keep the irate artist in a reflective mood, working gradually toward the most important question that would lay bare the process of creating "fascinello," the million-dollar color sensation.

Taylor wasted no time on the details of Steinbock's checkered life story. But with high excitement he pieced together the functions of the different parts of the machine. The papers which had fallen before his eyes gave the clues he needed. The lower end of the mechanism —the section in which Steinbock was so comfortably seated and strapped—was far enough from the silver bubble that the instruments of receptions and magnification, from the subject's two eyes, imparted a perfect focus to the near side of the delicate sphere.

The elaborate projecting arrangement was topped by a small movie camera, whose busy lenses were constantly at work capturing the pattern of mental images on films. From the soft, high-pitched hum of that camera, Taylor suspected that it was specially constructed for high speed. Indeed, it would have to be if it were to photograph the swift subtleties of the dynamic mind's-eye.

"THE IMAGE PROJECTOR is the final answer to my lifetime of experiments." Taylor read the typed words of the late Professor Tannenbaum with a respect that was almost awe. "I have long been convinced that the conscious mind operates through the whole body, not simply through the brain's cortex . . ."

What would the professor think, Taylor wondered, if he knew his wonderful invention had fallen into the hands of these criminals?

"The visual images that are stored in the memory," the notes continued, "can scarcely be confined to the brain exclusively. It is only natural that a mental image will stimulate a series of neural reverberations, which will race from the brain back over the paths through which they first entered the brain—back through the optic nerve to the eye itself.

"I have at last proved that these infinitesimal retinal responses can be detected, magnified and projected. At last the mind's picture can be literally seen."

THERE were two things about Steinbock's mental images that began to excite Bill Taylor more and more, the further the experiment went.

The first was that most of the artist's images were in dull, dreary, leaden colors. Only when the famed man broke out in a burst of bad temper or recalled some experiences that had evidently unleashed his rage, did the images show any symptoms of brightness: deep reds and glaring purples.

The other observation, which to Tay-

lor was constantly amazing, though it appeared to excite no interest in Laubmann or his assistant, was the continual recurrence of the blank figure.

The figure was always similar in size and shape to Steinbock's memory of himself but was never any clearer than a blurry shadow. As Steinbock grew into a youth the shadow grew up with him. When Steinbock fought or quarrelled or showed jealousy, it was often the shadow that was his adversary. Usually such scenes would quickly turn black or purple and Steinbock's sharp tongue would thrash out an insult or a note of impatience.

Bill Taylor consulted his notes again.

"Significant is the fact that many images are incomplete pictures, part being left blank in the conscious mind of the subject. I believe that the mental 'censor' continually strives to submerge some memories so deep in the subconscious mind that the conscious mind is never allowed to see them. Hence, the recurrence of blanks or shadows, which are in many cases things that the subject does not want to see."

Suddenly the experiment took a swift and dangerous turn.

"Now, Professor Steinbock, will you kindly recall your experience in creating the new pigment which has struck such an imparalleled sensation in the art world?"

As Laubmann spoke, he nudged Handy gently. The two men stood shoulder to shoulder in breathless attention, their eyes glued on the spherical silver screen.

Bill Taylor hoped that Maurine White, wherever she was, could see the swift flashes that shot through Steinbock's mind in that instant. Paints, easels, purchasers of pictures, fifty-dollar bills falling upon fifty-dollar bills, more yellow-tinted pictures, heaps of letters, piles of coins and bills—back of all these flashes was a blurred but unmistakable picture of Maurine White working at an easel!

The image of the girl's face turned to stare, as if into Steinbock's eyes, and her gaze was half in accusation, half in fear.

In a twinkling the whole secret tableau had come out. In a blinding flash of dark red it all disappeared. . .

"What the hell!" Steinbock was snarling. He jerked at the straps that held him in position. "I've had enough of this!"

"One moment of concentration on the new color, please," said Laubmann in a tense voice.

Another flash of Maurine White came and went.

"Let me out of here!"

"Fascinello, the world's newest, most wonderful color—"

The girl appeared again, busily painting a scene in yellow hues. Her eyes turned and grew large, until there was nothing but those two accusing eyes filling all the space.

"Stop, damn it!" Steinbock cried. "I tell you I'm through. I gave you my feelings on the color. I've given you enough feelings to explode your old machine. I think you're crazy. You and your whole club!

"Whoever heard of a temperamental autobiography? What does it look like? A stock market chart or blank verse or surrealism? What do you do with it? Frame it or smell it or smoke it in your pipe? Show me one and I'll eat it. I still think you're cracked!"

"PLEASE, Mr. Steinbock!" The squint-eyed man and his assistant removed the artist from his seat with all the courtesy they could muster. "Your efforts have been greatly appreciated. Science will not forget what you have done."

"Science!" Steinbock sneered. "Take me home!"

"At your command, Mr. Steinbock."

The three men started toward the door at the upper end of the room. Taylor's eyes followed them. He came up on his hands and knees. For an instant he thought his long-awaited opportunity was at hand. But the procession took a sharp turn to the right.

"This way, Mr. Steinbock." There was a brutal note in Laubmann's voice.

Taylor bent forward, but he did not see it happen, for the swift action took place in an alcove that was a part of the big room. He simply heard the unlocking of the door, a grunt of surprise, a stumbling of footsteps, and a relocking of the door. Then the two men marched back across the room, bringing Maurine White with them. And from the depths of the supply closet came the yowling and cursing and pounding of the imprisoned artist.

"You're next, Miss White," Laubmann barked above the din. "Sit down in that seat and clear your mind for action."

The girl responded obediently to the brusque orders. Soon the image bubble became a brilliant colorful thing. The girl's mind abounded with graceful symmetrical pictures, and even the faces of people were marked with strong lines and high colors like a fresh oil portrait. Here, thought Bill Taylor, is the secret of the artist.

Handy patted his revolver nervously, impatient to get on to that vital question about fascinello. But suddenly his hands froze and he stood gazing at the bubble. Laubmann drew a sharp breath and his right eye tightened.

The picture showed *two* Steinbocks! Something that the girl had been asked about her early contacts with the famous artist had brought forth this curious double portrait.

The two Steinbocks, apparently identical in every respect, stood beside an easel containing a half-finished picture. They were arguing violently. The girl was also in the picture. She started to leave the scene, and one of the Steinbocks seized her arm and pushed her back into the chair.

Other similar scenes followed. Laubmann and Handy exchanged whispers. Then the big man spoke casually.

"By the way, Steinbock has a twin brother, hasn't he?"

The girl stammered. "I—ah—does he?"

The two Steinbocks of the image stood glaring at one another, inspecting each other's appearance from head to foot. One of them wore a soldier's uniform, the other was in civilian clothes.

"Didn't you ever see the twin brother?" Laubmann suggested insistently.

"Twin brother? Perhaps I have. That is, I don't remember very clearly—"

Bill Taylor's face grew hot. "What the devil is she stalling about?" he asked himself. "She sees the twins as plain as day . . . Something's wrong here."

Taylor had never heard that Professor Steinbock had a twin brother, but no one knew much about the artist's past history.

LAUBMANN and his assistant exchanged nods, as if they were confident they were near to uncovering the mystery in the girl's anxiety.

"These two Steinbocks were jealous of each other, weren't they?" A confirming image passed over the screen. "But why should the artist Steinbock be so jealous of *you?* Have you given him any cause—"

The questioner's voice broke off. The flutter of images took an unexpected turn, and for an instant the girl was

dancing in the arms of a handsome young man. Although his face could not be seen, his attitude was that of possession. And Maurine White's countenance was radiant with happiness.

From his hiding place, Bill Taylor blushed hotly. On the instant his own jealousy was flaming.

"So there's another man in the case!" Laubmann gloated. "Maybe Steinbock has good reason to be jealous."

Then the girl's dancing partner turned so that his face was visible. One look, and all of Bill Taylor's green-eyed emotions melted away. His appreciation of the image machine was suddenly enhanced. The dancing partner of the image was *himself!*

"Hell," Laubmann muttered, "we're off the track. That's just that drug store kid." His voice became brisk. "See here, Miss White, I want to know about these two Steinbocks. Why don't we ever hear about the other one?"

"Maybe there isn't any other."

"But you admitted there was a twin."

"He was supposed to have been killed—in the World War."

"Now we're getting places. So he wasn't killed . . . he came back. . . . Go on from there."

The girl shuddered but made an effort to keep her voice under control.

"The two of them fought constantly. They made life miserable for me. I wanted to run away, but they wanted me for a pupil. I was a new student, and Steinbock had such a wonderful reputation—"

As the girl talked the constant train of images illustrated her bitter experience at the hands of the two jealous tyrants.

"Were they both artists?" Laubmann asked.

"No. The one who came back from the war wasn't. But he forced his way into the business. The artist Steinbock stayed in hiding and worked on his pictures. The other one went out and gave lectures and organized publicity, pretending *he* was the artist. I was the only one who knew there were two."

"Were two!" Laubmann echoed. "Aren't there still two? Answer me! What are you stalling for?"

Laubmann's voice scraped so harshly that for a moment the very poundings and cursings of the imprisoned Steinbock ceased. There was no sound but the faint hum of the movie camera busily photographing a blank picture. The giant bubble registered a blackout.

"I—I think the artist Steinbock died," said Maurine White.

The silvery gray screen suddenly came to life with an image that must have bubbled up from the furthest depths of the girl's subconscious mind.

According to the image, an angry Steinbock was entering a door. From the rapid twisting of his lips, the waggle of his goatee, and the tautness of his coppery wrinkled face, he was obviously hurling insults. Maurine White sprang away from the grasp of his claw-like hands. Her easel and paints tipped over.

Steinbock went into a violent rage. Again the girl sprang out of his reach. She ran to a table and jerked a drawer open.

A MOMENTARY blur crossed the screen. Then the picture came back vividly. Steinbock's face twisted with an expression of pain. He fell heavily to the floor. Blood gushed from a bullet wound in his head. His shaggy white locks, his trim whiskers were streaked with carmine.

The girl, clearly visible at the edge of the picture, apparently emitted a cry of horror. Her arms drew upward, her terrorized eyes were glued upon the

gun in her hand.

Then a third figure entered the scene —the other Steinbock. The girl backed away from him, but his hideous face bore down upon her. With one hand he seized her shoulder, with the other he pointed to his fallen brother. . . .

Maurine's head shook fearfully as she tried to flee the scene. But her trembling lips spoke the words that bound her to the deed. Inaudible though they were, they were unmistakable!

"I've killed him! I've killed—"

CRASH! The bubble was gone!

Like a meteor a man's figure shot across the room from the archway at the side. The figure was wrapped in a flimsy curtain, and it banged against the farther wall with the force of a heavy club. Man and curtain fell to the floor like a sack of meal.

Handy's revolver roared into action. A line of bullets flew through the darkened room. *Crack! Crack! Crack!*

There was no answering fire.

"Hold it!" Laubmann barked. "Get the lights on!"

The room flooded with white light, and the two men advanced upon the open archway. They peered for a moment, then stepped back and stared at the crumpled figure on the floor.

"You got him!" Laubmann muttered. "One of those bullets got him in the dark."

A short cry escaped the lips of the girl, but her low moanings went unnoticed.

Both men were breathing hard with excitement. They drew closer to the fallen prowler. His clothes, hands and face were streaked with dust. But it was the short red streak on the side of his skull that held their eyes.

Laubmann growled in an apprehensive voice, "If he's dead—"

"Hell, I didn't figure to kill him outright," Handy broke in nervously, trying to justify his rash actions. "Who is he and what the devil is he doing here?"

"We'd better wind up our business and get out!"

"Is he dead?"

"Wait—*no!* He's breathing. You see any other marks on him? That head wound's nothing. You just clipped him. Maybe he fainted. Help me drag him out here in the open and we'll—no, I'll handle him myself. You go and quiet that fake artist before he busts the door down."

Steinbock's pounding against the closet door had reached the danger point. Handy attended to him by firing a shot into the top of the door frame. The battering ceased. Only Steinbock's fearful mutterings were heard—mutterings that were half threat and half wild frenzy to know what was happening.

Handy turned, revolver in hand, and dashed back to Laubmann's assistance. And none too soon.

The dusty-faced prowler had come to life like a flash. He spun to his feet and flew into the big squint-eyed man with both fists swinging. Laubmann backed away, floundered for his gun. But the pudgy nervous assistant had Bill Taylor covered and on the spot. The dusty young man's fists slowly undoubled. His palms came up.

Laubmann's revolver now faced the new captive, and for the second time in the space of a few hours Handy threw ropes around Bill Taylor's ankles and wrists. Handy's hands were nervous this time, but he tied his knots to stay.

CHAPTER V

Double Bluff

"SO the cat came back," Laubmann snarled.

"Lucky for him that cats has nine

lives," Handy said, hoisting the shoulders of his butler's suit uncomfortably.

"That adage don't go for drug store cats," said Laubmann. "The next time he rocks the boat, he'll die like a dog." His hard eyes turned on Bill Taylor. "I'm talking about *you*. Do you get me?"

"Yes," Taylor answered.

That one word was all the young pharmacist said, and in itself it was an admission of defeat. Nevertheless, the strength and calmness of Taylor's voice was balm to Maurine White's terror-struck soul.

Bound to the subject's chair in the image machine, the girl had not been able to see anything that had happened. But at least she knew that Bill Taylor was alive.

A clock struck midnight. The hurried, hushed conference between Laubmann and his assistant terminated. Bill Taylor, lying in the rear corner of the room, watched them as they came back. He knew they were desperate.

They stopped at the locked door of the supply closet and tried to negotiate terms with Steinbock. The keyhole conference wasn't successful.

"Ready to talk business?" Laubmann snapped. "We've got it on you, Steinbock. We know you're a fake. We've got movies to prove it. We can blow your art racket out from under you so hard that you'll look like a sieve. Only one thing will stop us. Give us your secret on that new color—"

Whack! Whack! Bam-bllammmbam! The interior of the supply closet unleashed a pandemonium of such fury that the big room seemed to rock.

"One last chance!" Laubmann roared against the din. "It's your neck, not ours. All we want is—"

But Laubmann's roar was no match for Steinbock's. The prisoner's voice blasted back with the violence of a madman.

The threateners then tried their game of bluff on their Victim Number Two—Maurine. They reminded the girl that she was a murderer. They had films that would send her to the chair. She refused to answer them point blank.

They retired to their corner for another conference.

"What now, boss?" Handy asked.

"The machine again."

"But we tried that before."

"And found out plenty. All we've got on them so far, we got from the machine. Both of them tried to lie to us, but the truth came up in the pictures in their minds. Snap the white lights off, Handy. And keep your eyes on that drug store kid. I'll blow up another bubble."

While the two men prepared the image projector for action again, Bill Taylor lay in his corner thinking. He was thinking that sooner or later Laubmann would win. If the man put enough pressure on, he would get what he wanted.

Undoubtedly this big, bungling, squint-eyed criminal had expected to lift the formula for fascinello with a swiftly executed scientific trick. But now that he was into the heat of the job, he would probably commit murder for it if necessary.

IN his private whisperings with his assistant, Laubmann had mentioned a transoceanic plane that waited, ready for a take-off. Once in a foreign country he could cash in on his secret without trouble from the law. The two of them had agreed that it would be easy to keep Steinbock and the girl from talking. But what of their third victim, the intruding pharmacist?

The only answer the men had found to that question was indicated by a quick shifting glance from Bill Taylor

to Laubmann's own gun.

These sketches of thought whirled through Taylor's sickened brain. He ceased to listen, for another thought had begun to buzz. There was a mystery about that machine that he hadn't ironed out. . . .

Laubmann was again quizzing the girl, and the images were flickering once more. The big man's rasping voice played on every possible variation of the theme.

"What is the formula? Where did Steinbock get it? Where does he keep it?"

Images were flashing, and as before, the girl's mental pictures were of the young pharmacist. But Bill Taylor's own thoughts kept harking back to that earlier demonstration.

"How under high heaven could she have had a *memory* of dancing with me? I've never danced with her in my life!"

And then the obvious answer came clear!

"Those images aren't all just memory," he told himself. "They're partly new combinations—new pictures that have formed out of parts of old ones—new plans and imaginations and hopes! *But Laubmann thinks they're all actual happenings!* By George, if I had a chance—"

Bill Taylor came to himself with a start. The men were removing the girl from the seat. Laubmann was grinning with surly confidence. He snorted:

"At last it begins to make sense. The pictures have been giving us the true answers all along, only we couldn't read them."

"How so?" Handy asked.

"Well, when we ask old Steinbock about the formula, he sees the girl. And when we ask the girl, she sees the drug store chap."

"It's dizzy," said Handy.

"Not any more," said Laubmann. "See, we've found out that Steinbock don't paint. The girl does all that for him. All right; so all he knows about the fascinello is that the girl uses it. That's why he gets a mental picture of the girl."

"Then *she* knows!"

"No. We've been barking up two wrong trees."

"But she paints the pictures," Handy said stubbornly.

"Yes, but she doesn't necessarily mix all the paint. Her images prove that what fascinello calls up in her mind, is that prowling pharmacist there in the corner. He must make it up for her."

Handy grunted. "He makes up sulphur."

"I think," said Laubmann, choosing to ignore the sarcastic mention, "that the gods of luck blundered into our hands when this drug store sleuth broke out of your ropes and followed us."

And with that the two men, both having guns, engineered a transfer of Bill Taylor from his corner into the seat of the image projector. They had to unbind his hands before they could strap him into position. His feet they left bound.

MEANWHILE Maurine White crouched down in a chair inconspicuously and buried her face in a handkerchief. She appeared to be so unnerved by the whole affair that the men forgot about her.

"All right, Mr. Smart Pants, you know what we want," Laubmann barked, fastening his eye on the silvery gray bubble. A clutter of dim images began to roll across the screen.

Bill Taylor wished mightily that he could be seeing that screen—and then he realized that in a sense he was. The pressures about his face and the soothing liquid feelings against his eyeballs

encouraged his eyelids to stay open—against blackness. But the images he saw in his mind's eye—those fluttering pictures were finding their way through the projector.

To make sure, he fixed the letter A in his mind. The image sharpened. Then he brought the letter B beside it—and C.

"Cut out the A-B-C stuff!" Laubmann snapped. "Get down to business!"

A surge of elation shot through Taylor from fingertips to toes. Here was his chance, if he could work it skilfully enough. He had stumbled into this mess without a weapon. He had made foolish blunders and at times had lost his nerve, in a way that would have made a seasoned secret service man blush. But here was a weapon—a chance to slip in a fast one!

"Wake up!" Laubmann barked. "Come out of your dizzy whirl and put your mind to that certain fascinating yellow color. Where does it come from? Do you make it up yourself or does someone else—"

"I don't know anything about it!" Taylor retorted.

But there was a momentary flicker of image on the giant soap bubble that argued otherwise. It was the young pharmacist himself at work in his prescription room.

"Okay," said Laubmann sarcastically. "You don't know anything about it. That's fine. Now what are its ingredients?"

"I don't know."

At that moment a flash of a formula in handwriting came and went. It was hard for Taylor to pull his thoughts away from the truth.

"*Hold it!*" Laubmann exploded with the breathless excitement of one who is on the verge of landing a million-dollar catch.

Again the formula appeared—but only for an instant. It was like a blinding streak of lightning that illuminated vast wealth: a hidden treasure that might never be glimpsed again. Laubmann grabbed a pencil and made ready to scribble on an envelope.

"That formula!" he rasped. "Where is it?"

The formula reappeared on the screen, and in a clear solid image it suddenly moved back so far into the distance that the eye could not read it. Mentally, Taylor was putting it out of reach.

In the picture, Bill Taylor's hand held it, and he deftly folded the paper and sealed it within an envelope.

Laubmann and Handy involuntarily crept closer to the big silvery bubble. They watched breathlessly. Their subject seemed to need no further encouragement. The images rolled along freely.

So spellbound were the two men that they never guessed what was happening behind their backs. Maurine White had waited for just this very opportunity.

For a split second the bubble seemed to whirl, the formula envelope disappeared, and a man's two feet came into view—two feet bound with a rope. A small steely blade, perhaps a razor blade, slashed at the bonds. But at once the formula flashed back, and the two men remained frozen, intent. Laubmann started to write.

THE picture began to move swiftly. It showed Bill Taylor lighting a match to the valuable paper. It dropped to the floor in flames and Taylor stamped out the ashes. Then he dashed to a telephone and seemed to be in great agitation while he waited for his number.

He drew another paper from his pocket. An official paper. Creden-

tials. The paper enlarged on the screen. The words became legible.

The date of the certificate was recent. The message was plain. William Taylor, pharmacist, was a member of the United States Secret Service!

Bill Taylor was speaking briskly into the telephone. He quoted from another paper he held, and this paper also grew upon the screen into a close-up view. The hand-scrawled words were clearly legible. "Greenwood Village, Rural Route Two, Box Ten."

The young pharmacist's lips formed the unmistakable order, "I'll meet you there!" Then he hung up and dashed out—and the picture went into a whirl. . . .

"The hell!" gasped Handy. "This guy's a secret ser—"

"Shut up!" Laubmann snarled. "I know what I'm doing."

"But they'll be on our necks—"

"Listen to me!" Laubmann growled hotly, trying to bring himself out of his turmoil. "I'm running this show, and no handful of cops is gonna upset the works."

Handy raised a bewildered eyebrow. "You mean you already knew this guy was a secret service—"

"All the time," Laubmann bluffed. "That's why we're playing against time. We've just got time to get out before the cops he called bounce in on us—I think."

"But the formula?"

"We've got *it* all right!" On that question Laubmann was sure of his grounds. "It's on the film! Grab everything! We're on our way!"

CHAPTER VI

Portrait for Two

THE two men raced back and forth across the big room, snatching up film boxes, papers, blueprints. They smashed the bubble out of existence the first time it happened to be in their way. But bubbles and scientific mind-probing apparatus were things of the past now. Under the full blaze of the white lights, they swiftly filled two cardboard cartons.

Splinters flew outward suddenly from the supply closet door. The corner of a wooden box crashed through a panel.

"Tear the house down!" Laubmann yelled at his prisoner. "We don't give a damn! All right, Handy, that's everything. Come on. *Wait—what's this?"*

The big squint-eyed man seized his gun and marched back toward the seat of the image machine, his eyes glinting at the boy and the girl.

"Not trying to pull a fast one, are you, baby?"

"I'm dressing his wound," Maurine White retorted.

The big man glanced at the slow seepage of blood that streaked down the side of the young pharmacist's face. The girl had evidently touched the lever, for the boy sat upright. But the straps that bound his arms, shoulders and head apparently had not been unbuckled. His eyes were closed.

"Okay, you mop him up. See you on the homicide page of the Sunday supplement," Laubmann sneered.

He turned and stalked to the door where Handy, loaded down with cartons, fumbled with a key.

But the supply closet door opened first. The human volcano charged out. His wild white hair flew like smoke, and his voice bellowed like a volcanic roar.

"You dastardly, damnable whelps!" The mad Steinbock punctuated his profanity with a barrage of flying missiles. He stormed toward the two men, hurling every loose thing he could get his

hands on. Within ten feet of them he stopped.

"*Radio speech! Science! Temperamental biographies!* And *you*—nothing but a couple of murderous hoodlums! I'd like to fry you in a pan of fascinello and paint you all over the bathroom wall! You *measly dirty damnable*—"

The volcanic roar choked off as if the crater had suddenly gone dry.

Laubmann's gun hand came up—up—steadily—accurately poised. His eye grew tighter and fiercer. His big jaw jutted outward brutally. This would simply be a murder of convenience.

But Laubmann evidently did not see what Steinbock saw—the lithe figure of the pharmacist slipping along the right wall. The girl had succeeded in severing the straps that held him. Now Bill Taylor bounded for his lost weapon—the table leg, hidden in a pile of flimsy curtain.

"The kid!" Handy shouted.

Laubmann's gun whirled. Handy's boxes dropped. The girl screamed. And the club flew through the air with every ounce of Taylor's strength back of it.

A grunt of pain escaped Laubmann's lips. A deep breathy grunt that was pain, shock and stung pride. His hand jerked up limply. But the gun that flew from it never fell to the floor. The bony fingers of the mad Steinbock swung in a sweeping gesture and caught the weapon out of mid-air.

In a flash the gun looped to Steinbock's other hand and was again poised for action. And the wild, crackling, triumphant peal of laughter from Steinbock's wide-open mouth shot a chill through every spine in the room.

"I'm a fakir, am I? So you're going to tell the world! Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! We'll see who's shot through like a sieve!"

The hysterical tone vanished and a low guttural growl sounded. The gun wavered nervously, swept the line of faces.

ALL too obviously the demon in Steinbock was intoxicated by the fear he read in those faces, and for an instant he looked as though it would give him pleasure to shoot everyone down in cold blood. But his damaged ego cried to be restored. The pleasure of shooting could wait until he had spoken his piece.

"You low-down ignorant fools! You think you've got a formula. You think you can cash in on it for a million. Who says it's worth a million? I ask you! Who made it worth a million? *I did!*"

He tilted his shaggy white head and pointed his goatee impertinently. He gestured boldly with the gun.

"*I* sold that pigment! *I* made it worth a million! What if the girl did paint the pictures? *I* made people buy them. It was my lectures, my publicity, *my insulting personality, if you please,* that brought down this million-dollar avalanche. Do you have any stupid notion that *you* could do what I've done—you with the big ugly face and the frozen eye?

"These art-mongers would take one look and run the other way. They go in for eccentrics—like me—not for thugs—like you! Fascinello in your hands wouldn't be a color, it would be an animal—a white elephant—"

A rap at a door on the lower floor echoed up the stairs.

"Beat it!" Laubmann snapped. "They're on us!"

Handy dived to grab his boxes, but changed his mind, for Steinbock had had his words. He began to shoot.

Crack! Crack! Two shots went wild. *Crack!* Laubmann's forearm flew to his face in time to catch the bullet.

Crack! Handy's revolver blazed out

with one single deadly bullet. Steinbock fell, clutching his chest. His yellowish white hair swooped down like white rags on a falling mop-stick.

Bill Taylor lunged at Handy. He shot a staggering blow to the pudgy man's jaw. Handy tottered, writhed, tried to bring his revolver down to a bead. Taylor wrenched it from his hand. The weapon described a swift black arc through the air. Handy thudded to the floor senseless.

The gun that fell from Steinbock's bony fingers might have been recovered by its owner in that moment, had Maurine White not been alert. Laubmann, groaning with the pain of a bullet in his forearm, stumbled to a chair at the girl's command.

"Better not take any chances with me," the girl said tersely. Laubmann eyed her sullenly. Footsteps were ascending the stairs. Maurine White added in a low voice, "I'm a murderess, you know."

The footsteps reached the top of the stairs. Taylor's taxi driver looked in cautiously. The man had waited faithfully all that time.

"Come in," said Taylor, brandishing a gun. "We can use you. I knew it was you coming up those steps."

The hackman's eyebrows jumped. "Looks like you've had some action."

His eyes roved from the dying form of the fake artist to the big man with the whitened face and the reddened arm; then back to the pudgy man who sat on the floor, trying to open his eyes.

"Looks like you and the girl have cleaned house—"

"The state police will be here soon," Taylor interrupted. "That is—"

He and the driver had a brief whispered conference. The fellow grinned. He was an accommodating person, even at one o'clock in the night. While Taylor and Maurine held their guns, he knotted some ankles and wrists together, and fixed a few bandages.

"This artist is gonna die," the taxi driver said. "He's almost there."

TAYLOR bent over the eccentric old man. "Did you hear what he said?"

Steinbock's face remained expressionless, but weakly his head nodded.

"You're leaving Maurine in a devil of a jam," said Taylor. "You know what the films caught—the murder of your twin brother. Was that all true, Steinbock?"

Again the old man nodded. He whispered in weak, jerky gasps,

"That . . . was the perfect murder. No one ever . . . knew . . . except the girl. The gun she used was planted in the drawer. It was loaded—with blanks. She thought . . . that she . . . did it. But—"

"Yes—go on!"

"I did it," Steinbock gasped weakly. "I shot him from the door. She was so stunned, she never knew what really happened. . . ."

Taylor expelled his pent-up breath.

"Thanks," said the girl, pressing the old man's hand. There were tears in her voice. "Thanks so much."

"And thanks for your help in this fight," said Bill Taylor fervently. "Without you—"

"Hell," the dying man breathed. "I meant . . . to . . . kill them both. . ."

The taxi driver started to leave, to make the telephone call that Taylor had instructed him to make.

"Remember," whispered Taylor, "get the call through to *Chief Penniworth personally*. I'll show the Secret Service a thing or two!"

"When Penniworth finds out what you've done, he'll probably want to make you a Government man," said the driver in an undertone.

(Concluded on page 132)

The Man Who Knew

by

DONALD BERN

Nobody liked Mr. Scuttlebottom, but he didn't know it until he bought the book and found out how to read minds. Then he got the real truth. But when he decided to use his power, truth vanished

THE faded gilt sign read:

YE VILLAGE BOOK-STALL

"Fiddlesticks!" Scuttlebottom grunted. "Central City hasn't been a village for thirty years."

In such a mood, he tripped down the decaying stone steps and half fell through the rickety screen door, which he opened just in time.

"What the hell . . ." Scuttlebottom did a half somersault and lit on his pudgy feet, glaring.

A little man came walking slowly up the dusty aisle. He wore a pince-nez. He looked exactly like a person who wears a pince-nez. Only in this case, a little more so. His forehead was high, and locks of gray hair streamed down over his thin, gently inquiring face. He had a soft, straggly collar and a flowing bow tie; black sack suit, spats, and cracked patent leather shoes. He had eyes, too; quiet brown eyes that might have known a lot, but never said much.

"Yes?" said the proprietor of Ye Village Book-stall.

"Those stone steps," Scuttlebottom spluttered, "they're falling apart! I almost broke my neck coming in."

"Indeed?" said the proprietor. "Those steps have been here many years, you know. General Grant visited here one day many years ago to buy his wife a present. He stumbled over them, too."

"What the hell do I care!" Scuttlebottom roared. "I came here to buy a book, not to be killed."

"Ah, yes," said the proprietor. "Yes, indeed. I was sure of that the moment I saw you coming. Well, sir, is there any particular book you would be interested in?"

Scuttlebottom glared at him. "You probably wouldn't have it," he sneered.

"I have not everything here," the little man said, "but I have much. Oh, yes, indeed."

"Well," barked Scuttlebottom, "I want something different."

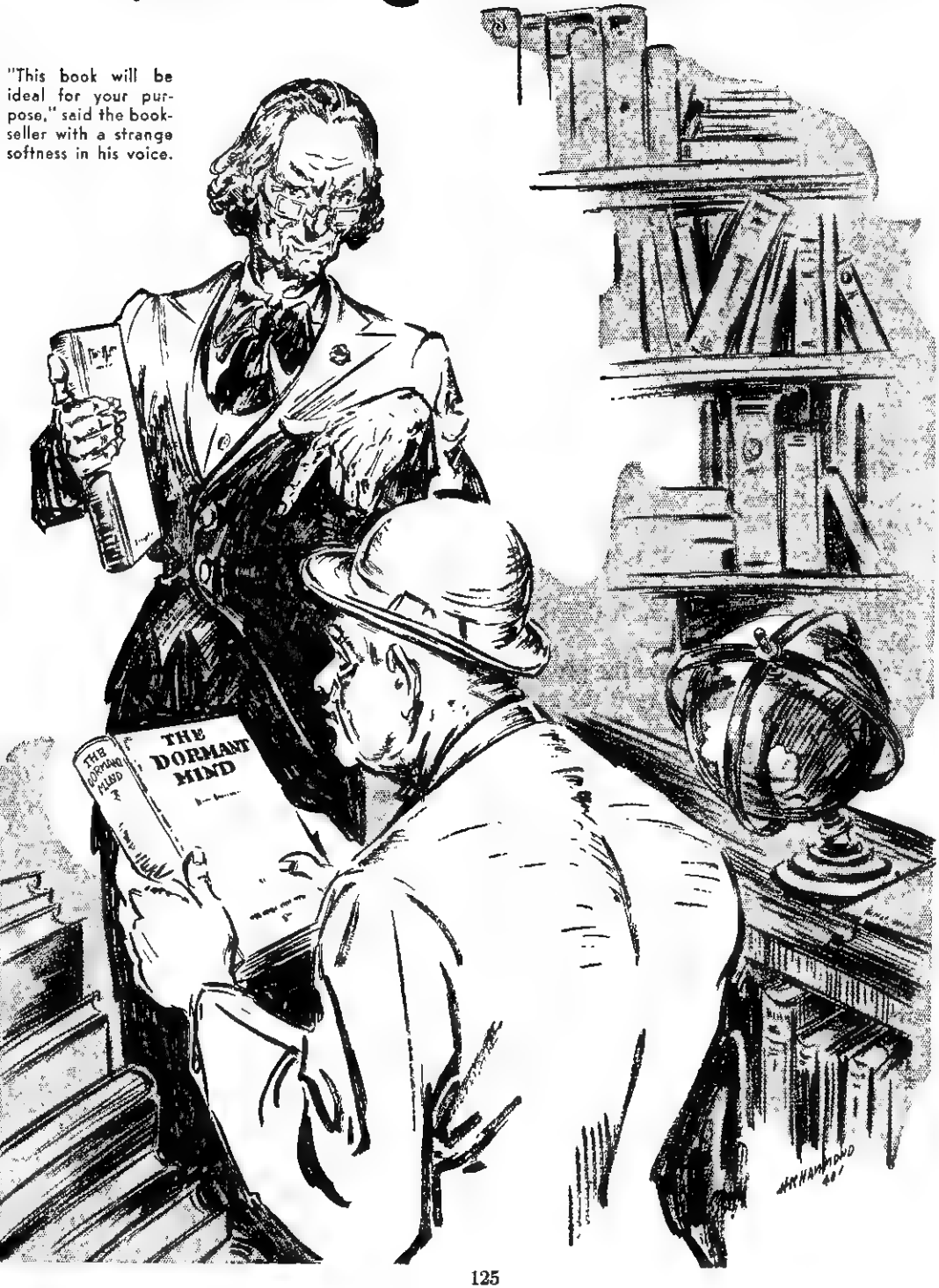
"Something—different?"

"That's what I said. Too many adventure books lately. Have to change off for a while. Understand?"

"I," said the little man, "understand perfectly. And I believe I have

All the Answers

"This book will be ideal for your purpose," said the bookseller with a strange softness in his voice.



just what you need."

He led the way along the dusty aisle to a particular dusty table covered with a helter-skelter assortment of dusty books on very dusty themes. He rummaged about in the dim light, finally found what he wanted.

"This," said the little man, "ought to do quite nicely."

He padded back up the aisle again, with Scuttlebottom coughing and sneezing as dust rose up and smote his sourpuss features.

The proprietor dusted off the little book on his pants, held the title up to the light. Scuttlebottom, squinting angrily, read:

THE DORMANT BRAIN

The title was printed in block gold letters, and the binding was of fine leather.

Scuttlebottom, anxious to get out of the place, barked,

"How much? And what is this thing about, anyway?"

"It is of the mind," said the proprietor. "With it you may read the inner thoughts of other people. It will give you a power such as you never dreamed possible."

"Rubbish!" roared Scuttlebottom. "How come you've been saving it, if it's so wonderful a book?"

"The right man," the proprietor said softly, "had to come along."

Scuttlebottom growled, tucked the book under his arm and strode toward the door.

"One dollar, please," said the pincenezed little man.

Scuttlebottom drew out a fat wallet, hastily peeled out a bill and flung it down on a book-covered table.

"Twice what it's worth," he grunted, pushing open the screen door.

"Not," said the little proprietor very softly, "to me."

SCUTTLEBOTTOM got home a half hour later. He walked into his house, flung his hat on the rack, washed his hands and came down to dinner.

Mrs. Scuttlebottom, a prim, scared little woman, had veal cutlets tonight, Scuttlebottom's favorite. Scuttlebottom, Junior, eighteen years old, seated himself apologetically and waited patiently for his father to be served. Junior had slicked back his hair tonight and put on a clean shirt.

"How is the meat, dear?" Mrs. Scuttlebottom asked in her nervous voice.

"Tough," Scuttlebottom grunted. "Rotten butcher. Buy your meat some place else!"

Mrs. Scuttlebottom flushed. Junior looked unhappy, too. He waited until his father was eating a particularly delicious piece of blueberry pie.

"Father—"

"No!" Scuttlebottom barked. "Business is bad. I can't go laying out money for silly gadgets and things. Why don't you go to work?"

Junior looked sick. "But father, the Senior Prom is coming off in two weeks. All the other boys are buying tuxedos, and I know where I can get a real nice one for only $22.50, and—"

"No!" Scuttlebottom roared. "What the hell do you think I am, the mint?" He wiped his mouth angrily on a spotless white napkin, rose from the table.

"Pie too sour, Martha," he grunted at his wife. "Work hard all day and can't even get a decent meal."

He slammed out of the dining room and clumped upstairs to his bedroom. He put on his dressing robe, settled comfortably in a big Morris chair and picked up the book he had bought, "The Dormant Mind."

Downstairs, Mrs. Scuttlebottom was crying, and Junior was trying hard not

to his own bitter disappointment.

* * *

THE evening grew heavy with darkening shadows. Scuttlebottom switched on the lamp over his head irritably and kept on reading.

Never, never had he ever in his life read a book that absorbed him as much as this one did. Even as the bookshop proprietor had said, he had never dreamed that such things were possible with the human mind.

In every brain, Scuttlebottom knew, there is the subconscious, which is at work even during sleep. But Scuttlebottom had never realized the amazing power stored deep within this portion of the mind. He had always thought that mind-reading was a fake, a phony, a counterfeit art practiced on sleazy vaudeville stages by crackpot entertainers.

Now as he read, a whole new vista of the human intellect was revealed to him. His eyes remained glued to the printed pages; his whole attention was utterly concentrated on the fascinating message there. And when he finished the little book, closely printed, it was with a start.

Dawn was streaking the eastern heavens.

"Gosh!" Scuttlebottom muttered. "I've been reading this all night."

He sat for a while, pondering the things he had read. Then he got up, rubbed his eyes, undressed mechanically and flopped into bed . . .

Scuttlebottom groaned when the alarm clock went off. But habit was too old to break. He pulled on his trousers, washed, finished dressing and went down to breakfast, late for the first time in years.

Junior was already sitting at the table. He glanced covertly at his father and noticed that his parent seemed to be thinking about something. Mrs. Scuttlebottom, seeing the same thing, said "Thank God!" under her breath. Maybe her husband would not complain about his carefully broiled ham this morning.

"No!" Scuttlebottom shouted suddenly, glaring up from his plate at Junior.

Junior, who had been thinking about whether to broach the subject of the tuxedo suit again, almost collapsed.

"I didn't say anything!" he bleated.

Scuttlebottom stared, realized that his son indeed hadn't said a word. Glowering, he returned to his eating.

Junior's mother and Junior exchanged unhappy glances.

"He's in a terrible humor again," they seemed to be telling each other.

"How dare you say such a thing!" Scuttlebottom roared, pushing back his chair and getting up in a terrific huff.

"We didn't say a word!" mother and son cried, white-faced.

SCUTTLEBOTTOM almost jumped. His heavy jowls got red.

"No, I guess y o u didn't," he grunted. "Anyway, you spoiled my appetite!"

He grabbed up his hat and stormed out of the house. Just as suddenly he stormed back in, stamped into the dining room and grabbed Junior's arm.

"What did you say about me?" he yelped.

Junior cringed. "But I didn't say a thing!"

Scuttlebottom shook in restrained rage. "Well, I don't like what you've been *thinking!*" he blurted.

Junior's blue eyes grew blank and round. He stared. He stared so hard that his father dropped his hold and stared, in turn, at the long-suffering Mrs. Scuttlebottom. Mrs. Scuttlebottom put a hand to her throat and stared

even harder.

"Oh, my God!" Scuttlebottom groaned. "You both think I'm crazy!"

Mother and son chorused, "We never said anything like that!"

Scuttlebottom flushed brick red, glared, shook, and then went stamping out of the house.

Waiting for the street car, Scuttlebottom, still hopping mad, was confronted by Nick Marshetta, the "newsboy" on that corner for the past fifteen years.

Nick had a sick wife to look after. Many of his customers never asked for the two cents' change from their nickels. Scuttlebottom always did.

"Da cheapskate!" Nick thought as he handed Scuttlebottom the paper and his change.

"What the hell did you say!" Scuttlebottom shouted.

Half a dozen people turned around and stared at him. Nick looked frightened.

"Never said nothin'," he muttered. "Always keep my mouth shut."

"That's the best thing you do!" Scuttlebottom rasped, and stepped out to the approaching trolley.

At his office building, in which he had an interest, Scuttlebottom was greeted by the plump, good-natured elevator man who usually took him up.

"Good morning, Mr. Scuttlebottom. Nice day out."

"I hadn't noticed it," Scuttlebottom snapped.

The elevator man didn't answer. But Scuttlebottom thought he had.

"You said I was a 'sourpussed old skinflint!'" Scuttlebottom shouted.

"I never said anything!" the man protested, knowing his job was at stake.

The other passengers in the car glared at Scuttlebottom. Among them were a couple of good tenants who had been threatening to move. Scuttlebottom choked.

"Must have been my imagination!" he muttered. "I guess I didn't *hear* you say anything . . ."

Scuttlebottom strode into his busy real estate office, looking right through all his scared employees as he barged down the aisle and entered his own sanctum.

He was sourly scanning some overdue tax bills from the city when his secretary for twenty years, Alfred Higgins, padded nervously into the room and stood quaking before the great man.

"Mr. Scuttlebottom," Higgins began, taking a deep breath and clenching his small hands determinedly.

Scuttlebottom looked up, glaring. "No!" he barked. "Absolutely not. You haven't had a vacation in five years, huh, so you think you're going to get one now? Well, *I* haven't had one in ten years, what do you think of that! What's good enough for me is good enough for you. Anything else?"

Higgins drew himself up to his full five feet two.

"Yes," he said quietly, respectfully, "I was offered a position yesterday with Harburton, Smythe and Scraggs. I am accepting it. And if you'll pardon my impertinence, sir, you may go to hell."

Scuttlebottom gasped. His mean blue eyes widened. Involuntarily he found himself looking through his open office door as Higgins walked softly to the rack behind the filing cabinets, took his hat off the stand, looked for the last time at the desk which had been his for twenty years, and padded unobtrusively out the door.

ALL the rest of the morning, Scuttlebottom sat staring out the window. Frightened employees came in with papers to sign. Scuttlebottom let them lay. There were several telephone calls. Scuttlebottom mumbled his replies, got

one call so badly bolixed up that it cost him a $5,000 realty commission. Scuttlebottom never turned a hair.

At lunchtime he went downstairs for a malted milk and a ham sandwich.

The counter boy looked at him politely. "Wish that fat slob would eat some place else. Never tips, makes the other customers uneasy," he thought.

Scuttlebottom choked. He grew very red in the face. He slammed down thirty cents, got up abruptly and stomped out into the street.

Across the street was the bank. Scuttlebottom remembered he had a big deal on at nine the next morning. He entered the place, drew a check for a thousand dollars and presented it at the teller's window.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Scuttlebottom," the teller said. But he thought: "The damned fat chiseler! They say he's even lousy to his family. Hope they get his dough when he kicks off. They certainly deserve it!"

Scuttlebottom got apoplectic. "How dare you!" he screamed hysterically. "I'll take my account away from this bank. I'll—"

The cashier had been standing near the teller, going over some accounts.

"But Mr. Scuttlebottom," the cashier protested, as the white-faced teller looked about to faint, "Mr. Watkins here only said 'Good afternoon'. Mr. Watkins has been in our employ for many years, and—"

Scuttlebottom gasped. And for the first time in his adult life, his dogmatic, matter-of-fact mind slipped a cog.

Watkins had never said any such thing, he realized in a panic. Watkins must have—why, he must have *thought* it!

Scuttlebottom got absolutely green about the gills. Nobody, it came to him with a terrific shock, nobody had openly insulted him all day. Nobody but his ex-secretary, and Higgins had *said* quite respectfully what he felt.

White as a sheet, Scuttlebottom snatched the thousand dollars the teller had been counting out, stuffed the bills absent-mindedly into his trousers pocket and lurched out of the bank.

Back to his office he went. The frightened look on his face scared the wits out of his already frightened employees.

All afternoon he sat in his office, refusing to see anyone.

"That damnable book!" he groaned. "'The Dormant Mind'. Oh, God, now I can read other people's minds! Now I know what everybody is thinking about me! And I can't *do* anything about it, I can't get anybody fired—because nobody *says* a single word!"

The afternoon sun went down. Evening shadows fell. Scuttlebottom, slumped in his swivel-chair, fell asleep finally, emotionally exhausted . . .

A fire engine clanging down the street woke him up.

Scuttlebottom started, rubbed his eyes, saw it was night. He switched on his desk lamp, looked at his watch.

"Nine-thirty! Must have been asleep a couple hours."

Haggard, worn, he took the elevator downstairs and walked over to the building register to sign himself out.

"Why, good evening!" the night man said. "Had a busy day, eh, Mr. Scuttlebottom?"

But he was thinking: "Busy day my hat! That fat pig works his people to death, pays 'em nothing and keeps all the dough to himself. Hope he falls down a manhole and breaks his neck!"

Scuttlebottom jerked as though prodded with a red-hot poker.

"Shut up!" he screamed. "SHUT UP! You're driving me crazy, *crazy* . . . ."

He bolted out the door, leaving a

badly frightened man in his wake. Heavy face steaming with sweat, eyes popping in mingled terror and rage, Scuttlebottom pounded down the pavement and turned off at the little street, not far from his office, where he had bought "The Dormant Mind."

"That bookseller!" he snarled, hysterically angry. "He's the cause of all this. He sold me that book! I'll kill him with my bare hands—"

"This is a stick-up, Mister! Hands up!"

OUT from behind an empty store stepped a slim figure. He held a revolver in his hand, a cap pulled slanting over his eyes. His voice was high-pitched, rasping.

Scuttlebottom stopped dead in his tracks. The maddened gleam in his hard blue eyes paled somewhat as the robber approached.

Under the dim light of a street lamp several stores away, Scuttlebottom made out his young assailant.

Thin, taut cheeks. Frightened, inexperienced eyes. Scuttlebottom looked into them and sneered.

The young thug was thinking: "I better make this good! My first job, and the gang won't take me in 'less I can hold my own. Gee, this guy looks big . . ."

Scuttlebottom stared a moment longer. Then his lips curled in a mean sneer.

"Bluff me, would you!" he snarled, and made a grab for the other.

The stick-up man jumped back with a scared cry. But Scuttlebottom was too quick for him. Scuttlebottom caught the youth's gun hand. Squirming, kicking, the thug jerked frantically at his wrist. The gun swiveled about to line on Scuttlebottom's sweaty head. Reflex action made the thief squeeze the trigger.

There was a nasty *crack!* Scuttlebottom's face dissolved in a gout of blood, and he slumped sickeningly to the pavement. The young thug took one look at the fresh corpse and passed out cold.

That was how the police cruiser found the two of them half a minute later, when the car came screaming to the curb in answer to the shot . . .

"You're lying!" the burly sergeant was snarling, and he made a pass at the youth.

Scuttlebottom's killer took the slap across the face, but he was crying anyway.

"I did not!" he sobbed. "I didn't kill him! *I thought the gun wasn't loaded . . .*"

(Concluded from page 5)

He and his associates have just spent seven months in India in experiments which resulted in the conclusion that cosmic rays do not occur frequently enough near the earth's surface for a steady flow of energy.

THE latest headline news in science seems to be U-235. And to science fiction readers that reads like fiction come true. The headlines ten years from now, if Professor Samuel K. Allison of the physics department of the University of Chicago is right, will read: "Atomic Power At Last!"

In ten years, he says, about ten pounds of U-235 will have been extracted and put to practical use. And ten pounds of U-235 will be equal to 50 million pounds of coal, insofar as resultant power is concerned. And that's a lot of coal.

U-235, newest giant of science, is 30 million times as powerful as dynamite—pardon us while we duck!—and we begin to wonder what *would* happen to the British *Queen Mary*, if a bomb containing U-235 were dropped on her decks? Maybe there'd be no doubt as to whether the Germans "did or did not sink a battleship."

Your editor wonders whether we want that kind of atomic power or not! *Rap*

THE INCREDIBLE THEORY OF DR. PENWING

(Concluded from page 45)

was that he had awakened from some hideous nightmare.

Someone was holding his hand. It was Sonie.

"Be quiet," she warned him. "You are pretty badly cut up. You need rest."

Bart's hand tightened over her fingers.

"Then it wasn't a dream," he said. "It was real."

"Too darned real!" said Sonie.

"And your father?" he asked. "Is he all right?"

"Yes. He has taken a truck and has gone to bring back the ship from where the Gorkins carried it."

"Huh?"

"Father explained it to me," Sonie went on. "He made a compass out of a bit of magnetized metal from one of the helmets. Then, after getting directions, angles and distances on the outer crust, he loaded the ship with Gorkins and returned to our back yard.

"He got his shotgun out of the house, had the Gorkins carry the ship down the street several blocks in the dark to a spot that corresponded with the position of the castle on the outer crust. He and the Gorkins got into the ship again and, in a few hours, made their appearance in the castle."

"And just in time!" said Bart.

The door opened at that moment, and Penwing came in. He was still wearing his helmet, and his face was beaming and his eyes were sparkling.

"We have proved my theory!" he said. "Young man, we have been to the outer crust and back. Now the skeptics . . ."

"Nuts!" said Bart. "We didn't go to any outer crust! There *isn't* any outer crust, except the one we are living on."

"But my theory—"

"—is all wrong," broke in Bart. "I got a look at the stars while we were there. They were the same stars I have seen since childhood—except that they were slightly out of place.

"Your ship is built in some strange dimension, I'll admit," Bart went on. "Probably the fourth dimension. What really happened was that the ship distorted time and space about itself in some way, carried us backward in time to some forgotten civilization in the remote past. That would account for the altered appearance of the stars."

"Young man, you can't prove that!" Penwing protested.

"You can't disprove it!" Bart snapped.

"I'll build another ship!" Penwing exclaimed. "I'll prove to the world . . ."

"If you prove it," said Bart, "you'll prove it alone. I've had enough!"

That was too much for Sonie. She stamped her foot impatiently.

"Quiet, you two!" she said. "Hasn't there been enough fighting for one day?"

Bart and Penwing looked embarrassed.

"I think you've got something there," Bart said sheepishly.

LOST TREASURE OF MARS

(Concluded from page 81)

Crane nodded. He pointed through the open door at the bubbling pool.

"There it is."

"You mean—the pool itself?" she exclaimed.

"Yes," he said. "What was the rarest, the most valuable, the most sought after thing on dying, drying Mars? *Water!* Water that was so scarce that it was always referred to as the Great-

est Treasure. Water so valuable that the Ushtu kings guarded their fountain with that hellish mechanical trap.

"I knew as much," Crane grinned, "when I translated the inscription, of course—knew there'd be no treasure here but water. But I used that knowledge in an attempt to gain a respite, hoping for some break that would enable us to escape Sweigert and the Jovian.

"They didn't dream, of course, that what they were coming here for was merely water. Sweigert, without knowing it, drowned in the very treasure he was seeking."

"Oh," said Jean. And that was all she could say.

But not Crane. "There's another treasure, however, that I found—" he began.

"*What?*" Jean's eyes snapped. "Not been holding out on me, have you?"

Crane took her in his arms. "Not any longer, you little goof. Not any longer!"

MYSTERY OF THE MIND MACHINE

(Concluded from page 123)

"That's the very point," said Taylor, grinning.

The driver left to carry out his mission faithfully. But before the state police came to take the situation over, Maurine White and Bill Taylor had a quiet half hour to themselves, for their prisoners were secure, if bitter and sullen.

"You never told me that you were a secret service man!" Maurine White exclaimed.

"I'm not," Taylor laughed, "but I made myself believe I was. Long enough to project some misleading images, anyway. You never told me that you've been dancing with someone who looks exactly like me," he accused her.

"But I haven't! That is, I could see it all so plainly that I—"

"I understand," said Taylor, with a smile. "Would tomorrow night do just as well?"

The girl gave one of her mysterious smiles.

"I was supposed to do some pictures, but now—maybe no one will ever want my pictures again."

"They'll want them more than ever when this story breaks," Bill Taylor declared wisely. "And don't you worry about your million-dollar yellow losing its value, in spite of what Steinbock said."

"*Your* million-dollar yellow," the girl corrected.

"*Yours,*" said Taylor staunchly. "I remember the day you first ordered it. You specified your want for the wildest color ever made."

"Yes, I was angry about my art lesson that day. I was furious and the only way I could express myself was to smear yellow over everything. But *you* invented it for me. It's rightfully yours."

Bill Taylor folded the girl in his arms.

"Who," he said with a huge grin, "could say no?"

Meet the Authors

MALCOLM JAMESON Author of
MURDER IN THE TIME WORLD

CONSIDERED as a science-fiction writer, I am only a trifle over two years old.

Considered as a human being, I am somewhat more ancient, having been born in the wild and woolly Texas of the Gay Nineties.

The first thing I remember is being in an Insane Asylum There, no doubt, was where the foundation for my present occupation was laid. To the people around me there, the fantastic was commonplace and the commonplace fantastic.

They let me out of that place at the tender age of six, and then exposed me to an education that comprised the most astonishing smattering of odds and ends ever crammed into an ordinary cranium About all I can say in this space is that it held a *little* of all the arts, all the sciences, and most of classic literature. But not much of any.

MALCOLM JAMESON

My activities since have reflected that hodge-podge of mental equipment superbly.

Here is a partial list of the jobs I've held in the past three decades (skip when you get tired, or simply can't believe it):

Land surveyor in the ranch country.

Road foreman and superintendent of bridge construction

Night clerk in a summer hotel.

Barker on a rubberneck bus

Bull fiddle player in symphony orchestra.

Foreman of frog-and-switch manufacturing shop

Machinist in a R R. roundhouse.

Landscape painter.

At odd moments between jobs I played tuba in bands, and once tried my hand at soldier-of-fortuning in Mexico during the Huerta-Carranza-Villa misunderstandings.

Came the war and nine years of Naval service. Life on a British cruiser at Scapa and in the North Sea; on our own battleships in big guns and fire-control; as engineer officer of a submarine, exec and navigator of a cargo type vessel, and captain of a subchaser.

There were side jobs, such as being aide to an ambassador and supervising an election in Cuba, governor of an island (population, 6), and the patrolling of Manila's rowdy cabarets. One time I had to manage a baseball team in China.

Afterward I peddled correspondence courses through the oil and gas fields of Texas and Oklahoma, operated a chain of service stations, and eventually wound up in New York City selling life insurance and air-conditioning. And last—this

There was some excitement, off and on—such as fires, battles, earthquakes, floods and hurricanes on shore; and collisions, strandings and typhoons at sea. Some of it was in Europe, some in Asia, some in Spanish America, and a lot of it right here at home—meaning the wide U S.A.

I've known a number of famous people, and a number that won't ever be famous.

Once or twice I've been on top the pile. Now and then the pile has been on top of me. Altogether, though, I've had a Hell of a good time.

If I can learn to sling words well enough to translate one-tenth of one per cent of what I've been lucky enough to observe into yarns you'll like, I'm in my last job. It *ought* to make me rich!

(Editor's note. Mr. Jameson's first story to appear in AMAZING STORIES was in our last issue. "The Monster Out of Space" was well received and now we again present a yarn from the typewriter of this newcomer. We feel sure that he will appear quite often in our pages, because he has long been a science-fiction fan and he knows what you like to read

"Murder in the Time World" is a story of travel in time, and is one of the time stories we promised recently. Mr. Jameson says of this story: "I like especially to write stories of this type, and this particular story is one of the first I thought of when I began to write science fiction. To tell you the truth, if all my stories took this long to write, I'd be far from that just mentioned goal—affluence!"

To which your editor is tempted to say: "Don't you worry, Mr. Jameson. No matter how long a yarn takes to write, if it's good enough, some smart editor will eventually buy it!"

And that, folks, is Malcolm Jameson.)

Science Quiz

The following quiz has been prepared as a pleasant means of testing your knowledge of things scientific and pseudo-scientific. We offer it solely for the pleasure it gives you and with the hope that it will provide you with many bits of information that will help you to enjoy the stories in this magazine. If you rate 50% correct in your answers, you are considerably ahead of the average. Give yourself 4 points for each correct answer.

TRUE OR FALSE

1. An atmometer is an instrument for the measurement of evaporation. True ... False....
2. An aneroid barometer is a barometer which contains a liquid instead of the usual mercury. True.... False....
3. A silver wire would be a better conductor of an electric current than a gold wire. True .... False....
4. An alloy of mercury with another metal is known as an amalgam. True ... False....
5. Vernal equinox is the time when the sun crosses the equator as it moves northward. True.... False....
6. The moon is a satellite of Earth. True.... False....
7. When mixing concentrated acid with water, it is proper to pour the water into the acid. True.... False....
8. It is possible to move 500 tons of weight, floated on oil, with as little as 1/650,000 of a horsepower. True.... False....
9. The spark plugs of a Diesel engine have to be cleaned after every 30 hours of use. True.... False....
10. The atomic number of hydrogen is 1 and its atomic weight is 16. True.... False....

I. Q. TEST

There is something wrong with the statements below. Can you tell where the mistakes are?

1. A man standing at the edge of a lake noticed that his thermometer had dropped to 25° centigrade.

Said he to himself, "If this temperature keeps this low by tomorrow, the ice will be frozen thick enough for me to walk on."

2. "This instrument, gentlemen," said Thomas Alva Edison, "is my latest invention It is an electric telegraph machine."

3. When hunting, African natives can tell the sex of a rhinoceros by the shape and number of toes shown in the tracks.

4. An ohmmeter is an instrument for measuring electro-motive force.

5. The English aviator waited impatiently while mechanics filled his plane's tanks with petrel.

CONSTELLATION MATCH

Can you match the following constellations with their English names? If you are able to get thirteen correct, you are doing fine.

Constellation	*English Name*
1. Andromeda	A. The Great Bear
2. Pegasus	B. The Whale
3. Lyra	C. The Chained Lady
4. Cetus	D. The Northern Crown
5. Ursa Major	E. The Swan
6. Piscis Australis	F. The Winged Horse
7. Cassiopeia	G. The Bull
8. Canis Major	H. The Sea Goat
9. Cygnus	I. The Giant Hunter
10. Delphinus	J. The Balance
11. Capricornus	K. The Lyre
12. Corona Borealis	L. The Lady in the Chair
13. Orion	M. The Dog
14. Taurus	N. The Southern Fish
15. Libra	O. The Dolphin

A MATTER OF CHOICE

1. A goldfinch is (A) a fish common in tropical waters, (B) one who deals in wholesale gold, (C) American thistle-bird, (D) an instrument used in dentistry.

2. Mars is a planet conspicuous for its (A) oblong shape, (B) red light, (C) distance from the sun, (D) seven moons

3. Mankind's first instrument of work was (A) a wheel, (B) a kerosene motor, (C) a sail, (D) a lever.

4. Chlorophyll is to plants as (A) hair is to the skin, (B) blood is to the body, (C) moss is to the rock, (D) the male is to the female.

5. Acetic acid is (A) the active principle of vinegar, (B) an acid obtained from milk, (C) an acid composed of chlorine and hydrogen, (D) common table salt.

SCRAMBLED EGGS

A storekeeper sold a number of eggs as follows:

First customer received half the number the storekeeper had and half an egg more.

Second customer received half of what remained and half an egg besides.

Third customer received half of the remainder and another egg.

After the last customer left the store, the keeper found that he still had three dozen eggs to sell. How was it possible without breaking the eggs?

(Answers on page 146)

QUESTIONS and ANSWERS

This department will be conducted each month as a source of information for our readers. Address your letters to Question and Answer Department, AMAZING STORIES, 608 S. Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill.

Q. *What is meant by earthshine?—A. B., Aurora, Illinois.*

A. The portion of the moon not illuminated by the sun is visible through light reflected by the earth. This illumination is called earthshine, and if you were on the moon during the moon's night, you would find all about you this light, coming from a large "moon" in the sky, and this moon would be our earth.

* * *

Q. *What is the lightest element known?—George Gregg, Wilmette, Illinois.*

A. Hydrogen is the lightest thing known. The air you breathe is 14½ times the weight of hydrogen.

* * *

Q. *In the June issue of* AMAZING STORIES, *the story "Trapped On Titan" spoke about a fellow power diving through space. He was testing a rocket ship. I thought that in space there is no up or down.*

For instance, we shall say that a man in a rocket ship looks out a window and sees Earth beside him, some distance away of course. That doesn't mean that he is flying (or rocketing) on his side. In other words, when you fly through space, how do you know when you are right side up?—Richard A. Geiser, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

A. Technically, there is no up or down in space, except when you speak in relation to a planet. As soon as the effect of gravity is felt, that direction is down. Theoretically, gravity is appreciable in its effect to an almost unlimited distance, and we might find that down meant every direction if we based our definition on gravity. However, when we are near a planet, then the gravity direction is down. Thus, power diving a space ship would mean driving it headlong into a gravitational field, which would create a speed in excess of motor speed due to gravity attraction. This is what the pilot did in "Trapped On Titan."

When flying in space, when not affected by a nearby gravitational influence, any way we fly is right side up. Only when we fly at right angles to a gravitational field do we run across the necessity of keeping the base of the ship (the floor) toward the attraction, so that we can walk about without difficulty.

* * *

Q. *I read in your magazine several issues back two things that puzzle me. First, your statement that the Rocky Mountains are growing higher, and second that a mirage can be photographed. Explain, please—M. B. Lovejoy, 151 S. Holly Ave., Maple Shade, N. J.*

A. We must accept the word of the scientists of most of America's accredited institutions that the Rocky Mountains are a "young" range and still being pushed up by the buckling of the earth's crust. The statement is based on actual computations of the past.

A mirage is a reflection of the light rays which normally come directly to the eyes, so why shouldn't a camera have the power to photograph a reflected scene? No doubt you've seen photos taken with the aid of a mirror. A mirage is an image in an atmospheric mirror. Thus, mirages can be, and have been, photographed.

* * *

Q. *Can you explain that when a rocket ship is projected into space, it does not explode because of the pressure inside being greater than the pressure outside? Also can you explain what gravitation is? K. A. Mitchell, 24 Beaufort Road, Leicester, England.*

A. An ordinary automobile tire has a pressure of 32 pounds, which is exactly twice that of the atmosphere at sea level, therefore, we may assume that rubber, cotton, etc, withstands such a pressure as that which we would find pressing on the inside walls of a space ship. If this is so, why is it so hard to believe that a space ship would be perfectly safe from explosion due to internal pressure? Metal can obviously withstand more than rubber. We have oxygen under pressure in tanks to several hundreds of pounds pressure. No explosion occurs.

Gravitation, technically, is the attraction of mass. It is a force exerted by the mass of an object which draws other masses toward it. But science does not know what gravitation really is. It might be electrical, it might be a warp in space due to the presence of mass, it might be a form of magnetism, it might be something entirely unsuspected by scientists. We wish we could answer that question ourselves. We'd win the Nobel prize!

* * *

Q. *Your Mr. Henry Gade credits Pluto with having an orbit that takes 3200 years to traverse. Is this right? I say no.—Kenneth Reusser, Linfield College, 129 South Baker Street, McMinnville, Oregon.*

A. You are correct, this is wrong. Originally, the astronomical figures on this were set at 3200 years, but later photographs showed, by comparison, that the true length of the Plutonian year was 248 years. Pluto is a 15th magnitude body, which is about the brightness of a candle 400 miles from the observer. This accounts for difficulty of observation.

DISCUSSIONS

AMAZING STORIES will publish in each issue a selection of letters from readers. Everybody is welcome to contribute. Bouquets and brick-bats will have an equal chance. Inter-reader correspondence and controversy will be encouraged through this department. Get in with the gang and have your say.

OH DEAR!

Sirs:

I am strongly opposed to writing letters, but I felt that I must express my thanks to you for continuing to publish AMAZING STORIES, the mag *this* SF fan likes to read. AMAZING STORIES is easily the best SF magazine published, but there are a few complaints I have to make. First of all, I'd like to take up the old cry that's been echoing and re-echoing through your Discussions: TRIMMED EDGES. Another complaint is your lack of space stories. There are too, too few of them these days. My third complaint is the absence of illustrations by Paul. Paul is by far the best artist you've got, and no issue could be complete without a front and back cover painting by him.

Adam Link triumphs again, or, I should say Fando Binder triumphs again. The chief difficulty with the Adam Link series was the attempted suicide at the end of each story, but, at last, that's been eliminated. The other stories were all good, but I'd rank them about the same. Keep up the good work and here's to bigger and better issues of AMAZING STORIES (with trimmed edges).

BARRY TOBIAS,
25-22 Deerfield Rd.,
Far Rockaway, N. Y.

YOUNGEST READER!

Sirs:

The letters of Clarence C. Hunt, and Forrest J. Ackerman, and the article by Mr. Ley on "Rockets" in the May issue prompted this letter, as I, too, am interested in rockets. The sad part is I know very little about them and I do not have a million dollars or so to spend on them, but I do have a lot of ideas (some of them cracked). But I seem to recall that a certain stratosphere balloon flight was financed by selling what was left for book-marks, and a trans-atlantic flight raised a nice sum of money pedaling ping-pong balls. A few variations of the same basic idea could be used to finance rocket experiments.

However, I go Mr. Ackerman one better with my ambition. The headlines do not interest me; I want to set my own foot down on the moon before I die. (My wife thinks I'm nuts.)

While I am started on this I would like to nominate my son (age 4) as the youngest reader of SF in captivity. Of course, he can't read himself, but I read to him occasionally and he gets the old copies all over the house looking at the covers and illustrations while he makes up his own stories to fit the pictures I think he likes Paul best, but he goes to town with Krupa too Sometime I will take one of his stories down and send it in to you.

DAN WILHITE,
1122 Center St.,
Little Rock, Ark.

Your editor certainly hopes the old adage "like father, like son" holds true, and that your 4-year-old son keeps on being a fan.—Ed.

NUMBER ONE FOR GALLUN

Sirs:

I think that "Terror Out of the Past" is the number one story of the month because it is well-written, descriptive, combining adventure and romance with a good scientific background.

I have read AMAZING STORIES since 1934, and I think you really have a good magazine.

Publish more stories dealing with time and its theories, combined with a good story.

VIRGIL BRAND,
Smithfield, Nebr.

We can promise you some time stories in future issues, and there's one by Jameson in this issue, "Murder In The Time World." Let us know how you like it.—Ed.

SUNSPOTS AND GIANTS?

Sirs:

I bought your issue of May, 1940, AMAZING STORIES and read "Giants Out of the Sun" and then the electrical sunspot activity occurred a day after.

No doubt you people have heard about this too.

There are some points about the story that need clearing up if there *is* some basis to it.

Could it be difficult for the Peruvian government to check up on its inhabitants and why didn't they in view of the medical disasters and their connection with Dr. "Dean?"

Doesn't seem possible (aside from the fantastic story for entertainment) that ancient people exist without the knowledge of the Peruvian government, much less a city with Inca architecture and people.

Why doesn't the Peru government, or even in-

terested governments inquire or make a vast exploration based upon the map you have depicted in the story? Does not there exist a vital concern for its people's welfare?

Couldn't airplanes penetrate below the "mist" and photograph the whole layout and deliver an ultimatum to come out or else?

SOL MOGELEFSKY,
4110 Roosevelt Rd.,
Chicago, Ill.

According to Mr X, he couldn't get the Peruvian government, or anyone else, to believe his story, and hence, no expedition, no airplane searches, no penetration into this mysterious Inca civilization But maybe something will turn up, and when it does, we'll be first to pass on the information.—Ed.

A READER FOR 15 YEARS

Sirs:

I have intended dropping you a line for a good many years. I have consistently read AMAZING STORIES for about 15 years or thereabouts. I cannot quite remember.

I very much enjoy AMAZING STORIES and despite the ever-increasing number of science fiction magazines, yours still ranks top on my list. However, I have one regret, and that is that you seem to have lost "Professor Jameson." I must say I enjoyed his adventures more than most of your stories.

As for my favorite stories of the past few months, I liked "Giants Out of the Sun," "Adam Link," "History in Reverse," "Terror Out of the Past," "Black World," and also our old friend "Brutus Lloyd." These stories seem to me to be more after the style of some old friends of 10 years ago.

I am glad to see that the Science Quiz is improving. I seem to remember misprints, or errors in 3 consecutive editions. I enjoy this article, and now, thanks to AMAZING STORIES, usually average in the 80% class.

In closing, I must again commend you on "Giants Out of the Sun" and your article, "12,000 Years Ago." I for one would give anything for more true information regarding Mu, Lemuria and Atlantis.

I do not expect to see this published in your magazine, as it is my first letter to any magazine of any nature, and in all probability my last, as I am a poor hand at putting my thoughts and ideas on paper.

J. E. HYLAND BARNES,
2014 W. 8th St.,
Los Angeles, Calif.

P.S. How about reprints?

Once more Jameson comes to plague us. Now, we'll take up your challenge and see what can be done. Mr. Jones is being written immediately, and if Mr. Jameson can be brought out of his hideaway in space, where we "lost" him, we'll do it. But we bet our bottom dollar that when he does, it'll be in a story that you will agree meets our policy.—Ed.

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30x5.00-20	2.65	1.25
6.25-17	2.90	1.35
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.85
31x5.25-21	2.25	1.35
5.50-17	3.35	1.40
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
6.00-17	3.40	1.40
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.40
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.45
32x6.00-20	3.45	1.50
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33x5	3.75	1.75
35x5	3.95	1.75

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Dept. E-239 Rochester, N. Y.

Thanks for your comment on the quiz. We try to buy correct quizzes and we've had plenty of headaches checking up on their accuracy.

Reprints? Watch this magazine for an announcement, possibly in our next issue, concerning—well, watch for it! Ed.

ATTENTION MR. WEINER

Sirs:

I was extremely interested in Frederick Weiner's letter in the July Discussions. I should have thought that his physics teacher would have been able to answer that one. But let me see what I can do with it.

First of all Mr. Weiner, if you went half way to the center of the earth you wouldn't weigh four times as much as you do on the surface. At the center of the earth your weight would not be zero. *Your weight would be zero* though at the *center of gravity*. The two do not correspond because the moon enters into the picture and moves the earth's center of gravity off a little.

Now, we don't violate Newton's law either. Remember that Newton's law says: ". . . attraction between two bodies. . . ."

As we penetrate the earth's surface, our weight *decreases*. Say we are twenty miles down. Each small particle in the twenty miles above us is attracting us in accordance with Newton's law. So is each particle still below us. Our weight is the *difference* between the two forces.

If we are at the center of gravity we have no weight, because the particles on all sides exactly cancel each other. Our weight is zero.

Don't confuse mass and weight, though. Mass is constant, but weight is a very insecure thing—it just seems to be an artificial (though I'll admit it's very real to us) attribute of matter.

Hope this answers the query, Mr. Weiner.

I haven't read any of the stories yet, but the issue looks swell. It's the best cover you have had in a long, long time. Paul's work is good as usual.

FRED A. SENOUR,
210 Alameda St.,
Rochester, N. Y.

Thanks, Mr. Senour. You seem to have said it. And we're glad you liked the July cover.—Ed.

BRAVO! LYDIA

Sirs:

I have seen several letters regarding "The Strange Voyage of Dr. Penwing" and also a very interesting sketch which seeks to prove that we cannot be living in the interior of a sphere, but on the exterior, as it is commonly known.

According to this sketch, based on the way we think gravity works, the projectile of a big Bertha would hit a point between the gun and Paris, if we were in the interior of a sphere. But, if it hap-

(Continued on page 140)

THE GOLDEN PRINCESS

HAS the human race had before its eyes for centuries hints of other worlds, hints which it has persistently and blindly ignored? That was the question Nick Hall and "Slug" Maroney were facing as they pondered over the weird events of the past six days!

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(Continued from page 138)

pens that we are not wise enough to find out that we are in the interior of a sphere, it might be possible that we don't understand how gravity works.

Suppose that instead of attracting things directly to the ground, as we think it does, the gravity force makes things float in a certain way, which the tricky light of the interior of the sphere makes appear as a parabola in the case of a bullet.

Then, *it would be possible* that we are in the interior of a sphere.

Although this is my first letter, I always read AMAZING STORIES. I particularly liked the originality of "Revolt of the Ants", and "Giants Out of the Sun" was a wonderful yarn.

LYDIA HAMMEL,
1550 1st Ave.,
New York City.

Here's a young lady who knows her science too. So what do you say about that, boys? Maybe Penwing isn't wrong after all?—Ed.

HE'S "BURNED UP"

Sirs:

I am very glad to see Adam Link back, and hope to see him again soon.

In the May issue "Giants Out of the Sun" was all right, but the "plug" about it being true was the last straw.

Hok is a welcome figure, and will be expected back. Mr. Wellman does a fine job on him, and gives us some interesting facts about the past.

"Liline, The Moon Girl" was interesting because of the element of suspense in it. The only trouble in the story is: if the moon became a second sun, we would have daylight almost all of the time, which would be a slight inconvenience.

"John Brown's Body" was good fiction, and I think in a later issue John Brown would be very amusing as a woman.

What has happened to the "Laboratory Sleuth?" I am sure all of us would like him back.

In Mr. Gleason's diagram of "Big Bertha" the earth is curved too much in so short a distance. If the earth is leveled off more it will hit Paris.

I think AMAZING STORIES is "tops" and it burns me up to hear people call it down

CHARLES MCBRIDE,
Waterville, Kings Co.,
Nova Scotia, Canada.

Thanks for all your interesting comments. And your mention that you are burned up about people calling us down interests us. No doubt you refer to our more vociferous readers, those who make up that amazing cross-section of science fiction, the fan world. You may remember they held a convention last year, and are holding another this year in Chicago. But don't worry about what they say, because, (and here's a little secret between you and me confidentially,) they try to keep your editor on his toes by telling him how odorous he is. But how they love him, in spite of it all!

—Ed

(Continued on page 142)

6 OTHER THRILLING STORIES!

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★ **THE WOMAN WHO TURNED TRAITOR—by Alexander Blade.** It's bad enough to lose the woman you love, but when you do her a favor, and she pays you back by turning traitor and ruining your chance at a valuable mail contract . . . !

★ **TROUBLE ON TUMOA—by A. R. Steber.** There was something mighty fishy about John Ahu, college-bred cannibal, and his important cargo of farming implements. What made these tools more valuable than life?

★ **TREASURE OF THE DEAD—by David Wright O'Brien.** Insane jealousy of his partner made Monte Mason plot murder. But then a sunken treasure of gold threw a different light on the matter, and the plot became more complicated . . . !

★ **CHEAP LOVE—by Robert Moore Williams.** Jim Doyle spent six months lying around in this tropic paradise trying to locate a treasure trove, then he got to liking it. Until he learned the meaning of native love!

Love FINDS REVENGE

SO Kathie thinks I'm a beachcomber . . . a bum . . . a worthless derelict past all salvaging, eh? Jim Rand's rum-dulled brain accepted this sophistry as truth . . . and why not? Half-caste Luweena was paganly alluring; her lips held promise of willing surrender!

Rand took the native girl in his arms. "I'm pulling out of here, Luweena. You want to go along?" Her sleek tawny body quivered at the thought of these tempting words.

"Where will we go, my lover?"

"Anywhere that'll make me forget this whole damned outfit!" Rand said huskily. His voice was thick with fiery liquor! Then a crooked grin came to his mouth. "But first, we'll have our vengeance, Luweena! . . . to hell with the plantation . . . to hell with old man Vandoep . . . and to hell with Kathie."

What vengeance did this rum-pot plantation overseer and half-caste native girl plan? How was their plot foiled? . . . and eventually a boomerang at their own objectives?

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How many military planes has Il Duce at his command? What effect did the Civil War in Spain have on Italy's air power? How do Mussolini's planes compare with the ships of England, France and Germany? Why are engine design and production the weakest departments in Italian aviation? Leonard H. Engel, who has just returned from war-torn Europe, answers these questions for you in an authoritative account of the 1940 Italian air force. Turn to page 10 of the

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A Correspondence Institution

(Continued from page 140)

THE JUNE ISSUE REVIEWED

Sirs:

A short comment on your June issue. First the stories:

1. Slave Raiders From Mercury.
2. Planet of Black Terror.
3. The Mathematical Kid.
4. Warlords of Mars.
5. Trapped on Titan.
6. Treachery on Planetoid 41.

All were very good excepting the sixth which really wasn't necessary.

Illustrations: Krupa is still your best man for interior work. The back cover was well done. The front cover I didn't care for, for no apparent reason.

Departments: All well done; no complaints.

Have Festus Pragnell try his hand at another character. I don't think Hargreaves is so hot, but maybe that is because of my intense dislike for satire.

"The Mathematical Kid" could be developed into a very promising character. Let's have him again.

ART R. SEHNERT,
Sec.-Dir., Tennessee Fictioneers,
791 Maury, Apt. No. 1,
Memphis, Tenn.

Wilcox undoubtedly ranks first in the June issue. His story received more comment than any recent story, and we feel that Mr. Wilcox has written another one to equal his "When The Moon Died."

We expect him back soon with a rather unique short novel.—Ed.

BRICKBATS

Sirs:

At last I write—after reading AMAZING STORIES for years—and I don't imagine that it will be printed for the simple reason that most of it is brickbats . . . (Big, new Hard ones) . . . Though you may print such remarks, still it's only human to steer clear of as many as possible.

First I wish to say that I think the main fault with AMAZING STORIES is the fact that few, if any, of the stories are Amazing. Just, if I may quote Nelson S. Bond, "credible characters doing credible things," nothing unusual—nothing different—nothing exceptional—NOTHING NEW. Old plots of tall heroes being accused of crimes they did not commit, or a mad nasty scientist invents a death ray and plans to rule the world. But don't misunderstand me for I don't mean every story, (you printed some of the best). I really liked the Adam Link series, "The Four Sided Triangle," "Black World," and several others.

Now for the flowers! ! ! Your last issue—The Interplanetary Issue, was a whiz . . . every story was a honey, but when will we get the rest of the story "Treachery on Planetoid 41?" Read it carefully and see what I mean. . . . I flicked over the page intending to continue reading, and I was

(Concluded on page 145)

TRAPPED ON IO!

Little did Quirk Conovan know when he took off from Mars in his tiny space-rocket that he'd come face to face with a fantastic monster . . . a six-legged, slim waisted, chitin-armored creature with two lobster-like claws! But there it was . . . a living, natural fighting machine!

How Conovan discovered this incredible machine-like monster and escaped from its treacherous death-dealing claws, marked the beginning of a series of thrilling adventures for this interplanetary agent on the wicked world of Io!

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AMAZING STORIES

SEPTEMBER ISSUE ON SALE AT ALL NEWSSTANDS JULY 10th!

LIFE ON CALLISTO

(MOON OF JUPITER)

By HENRY GADE

Science knows little about Callisto, but of all the satellites of the solar system, it is one of the most likely to support living beings

(See back cover painting by Frank R. Paul)

CALLISTO is the second largest of Jupiter's moons, its diameter being 3,142 miles, which makes it slightly larger than Earth's moon. Little is known scientifically of this world other than a few technical points. Namely, its eccentricity is 0.0075, its inclination to orbit of planet's orbit is 2 degrees, 42.7 minutes, its sidereal period is 16 days, 16 hours, 32 minutes, 11.21 seconds. Its distance from Jupiter is 1,168,700 miles, which makes it the most distant of the major satellites of Jupiter

From these figures, and from our knowledge of Jupiter itself, we may theoretically deduce what the conditions on this world are. It is too far distant from the sun to get much warmth from that body, but Jupiter itself seems to have an inner warmth of its own, which aids in keeping the satellite livable.

We may assume that the world is a young world and that it still has much volcanic activity. Its gravity would be about one fourth that of Earth.

It can be assumed to have an atmospheric blanket, sufficiently dense to support luxuriant vegetable life and rich enough in oxygen to make animal life quite reasonably existent.

Because of its rotation about Jupiter, it undergoes temperature changes which may vary quite a bit from period to period. Sometimes this temperature will be kept high because of the combination of solar heat and Jupiter heat. Again the absence of either source would cause a drop in temperature.

Artist Frank R. Paul has pictured the Callis tonian as an eight foot giant, completely covered by a lizard-like skin, and protected about the head, breast and back by heavy white fur.

He has given him a rather high intelligence, and attributed to him a quite idyllic civilization.

He has drawn remarkably well on his imagination in spite of the fact that so little is known of this world, and we may safely assume that if life does exist on this world, it might easily be very much similar to his artistic conception.

However, let us voyage to Callisto with our space traveler and land upon the planet.

We experience no difficulty in landing, because of the light gravity, and we equip ourselves as we would on our own moon. We wear weighted shoes so that we may be enabled to walk without using an excess of muscular effort and thereby tumble about awkwardly.

We wear an air-tight suit because we don't know whether or not the atmosphere of Callisto will prove poisonous to us We retain this suit all during our visit.

We wear a copper suit, with non metallic parts treated with copper solution, so as to avoid possible oxidization which might result in damage to our suits, and admission of poisons.

Our first glimpse of the new world is a bit spectacular. We see a volcano in the distance, belching a great column of flame and smoke into the atmosphere. The ground beneath our feet trembles perceptibly. In the lowlands, thick jungles grow, towering in the air with carboniferous period luxuriance. Here and there steaming warm springs and geysers gush from the ground

Walking from the jungle, we come upon the first sign of living beings. We see a city. It is not a large one, but its buildings are amazingly massive. They would be truly ponderous on our own Earth, but here in this light gravity, tremendous blocks of stone, mostly basalt and lava rock, have been carved and used in building great buildings of not more than two stories.

Obviously the cities are constructed as permanent earthquake resisting communities.

As we approach, we are met by the Callistonians. They are tall, two feet taller than we are. Their skins are colored a curious blue, and are thick and scaly, like lizard skin. They have a certain arboreal, chimpanzee look about them, yet they are obviously intelligent.

They prove quite friendly, since life on their world does not demand the development of warlike tendencies for existence.

They wear skin clothes, of spare design, woven from vegetable matter. They have two sets of arms, very tentacular in nature, and obviously very useful in climbing the giant trees of the jungle.

And no doubt we will find that they reproduce as do the reptiles, laying eggs which may be placed in the natural warmth of the springs, where the young hatch and develop to maturity, going through a tadpole-like developing stage.

(Concluded from page 142)

really interested, only to see a beautiful girl holding a fellow on a rope with bold lettering, "Planet of Black Terror."

KONRAD WM. MAXWELL,
648 S. Main St.,
Opelousas, La.

Your editor is heartbroken. Everybody accuses him of suppressing brickbats, and the truth is, he avidly pounces on each one that comes in, so that he can give variety to his column. Anyway thanks, Konrad, or should we pun it—Comrade!?—Ed.

CORRECTION

Sirs:

Re: June issue. The cotangent of 90° is zero, not infinity. The tan. 90° is infinity. This is not controversial; it is of record.

CONTRACUS.

Sorry this error crept into the Quiz. We publish your letter as correction.

And, that, my dear readers, ends the discussion for this month. We'll be seeing you in September with more readers' letters.—Ed.

CORRESPONDENCE CORNER

Jack Hill, 620 Gilmour St., Peterborough, Ont., Canada, is interested in Chemistry, Esperanto and Scouting and would like to hear from pen pals. . . . John Cunningham, 2050 Gilbert St., Beaumont, Tex., would like pen pals from U. S. A. and foreign countries, and is interested in collecting and trading stamps. . . . Albert Mendelbaum, 1243 Juniata St., N.S., Pittsburgh, Pa., has for sale a rare copy of an old SF magazine; book goes to highest bidder. . . . Stanley Arnold, 600 W. Clinton St., Frankfort, Ind., would like to purchase issues of old SF magazines. . . . Don MacTavish, Jr., 467 Albertus Ave., Peterborough, Ont., Canada, would like pen pals interested in Chemistry, Science Fiction, or Esperanto; either sex between 15-16 yrs. . . . Paul Gerhracht, 1053 W. 25th St., Erie, Pa., would like correspondents of either sex between 16-18 yrs. . . . Steve Warnar, 144 S. Broadway, Yonkers, N. Y., has for sale various volumes of weird magazines; all in good condition. . . . Robert White, 911 East Ave., Elyra, O., would like pen pals who will play chess by mail and discuss Science Fiction. . . . Leonard Panske, 2205 W. Iowa St., Chicago, Ill., has a complete set of magazines of which to dispose. . . . Bill Stolze, 900 St. Louis St., Edwardsville, Ill., would like to obtain back issues of AMAZING STORIES and other SF magazines dating before January, 1939; send complete list, and his preference is for single issues. . . . Charles Biggs, c/o Mrs. Roberts, 407 S. Eden St., Baltimore, Md., would like to buy back issues of various magazines; send lists with prices. . . . William Graham, 14½ yrs., "Sunny-

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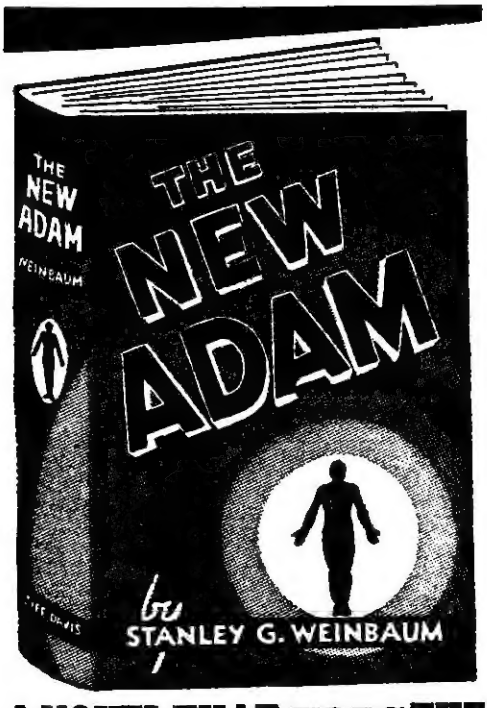
RADIO NEWS



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Croft," Cockermouth, Cumberland, England, wants American correspondent who would exchange stamps. . . . Roy Stevens, 80 Columbia St., Batavia, Ill., is an ex-soldier who collects empty match book covers, milk bottle caps, pennants, and is interested in mineralogy, geology and stamps. . . . Alfred Edward Maxwell, 648 S. Main St., Opelousas, La., would like to start a scientific club in his section, and is interested in receiving letters from those people having photography, astronomy and writing as hobbies. . . . A. E. Reid, 12, Howard Road, Leytonstone, E.11, London, England, would like to receive copies of *Amazing Stories* and other SF magazines. . . . E. R. White, 73 Taunton Road, Toronto, Ont., Canada, belongs to a club whose aim it is to further science fiction in Canada; anybody interested? . . .

QUIZ ANSWERS

(Quiz on page 134)

True or False

1. True. 2. False. An aneroid barometer contains neither mercury nor a liquid. 3. True. 4. True. 5. False. It is the *point* where the sun crosses the equator. 6. True. 7. False. It is the other way around. 8. True. 9. False. Diesel motors do not use spark plugs. 10. False. 16 is the atomic weight of oxygen, 1.01 is the atomic weight of hydrogen.

I. Q. Test

1. Water freezes at 0° centrigrade, not 25°.
2. Thomas F. B. Morse invented the electric telegraph.
3. The rhinoceros is a hoofed animal.
4. An ohmmeter measures the amount of electrical *resistance*.
5. Petrel is the name of a sea bird. *Petrol* would be correct.

Constellation Match

1C, 2F, 3K, 4B, 5A, 6N, 7L, 8M, 9E, 10O, 11H, 12D, 13I, 14G, 15J.

A Matter of Choice

1C, 2B, 3D, 4B, 5A.

Scrambled Eggs

The possibility of this will be evident when it is considered by taking the half of an odd number we take the exact half times ½. At first the storekeeper had 295 eggs; he sold first 148, which is half times ½; 147 remained. To the second he sold 74, which is major half of 147. After selling 37 out of 74 he still had 3 dozen left.

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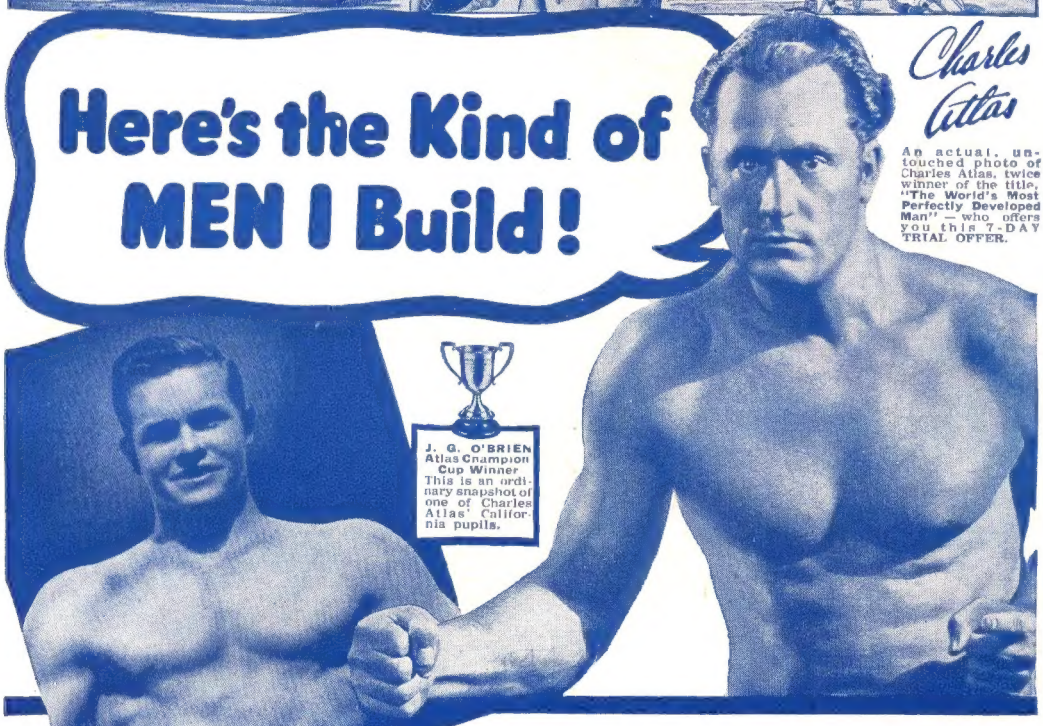
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LIFE ON CALLISTO

(MOON OF JUPITER)

Since this satellite is as large as Earth's moon, science says it is quite capable of supporting life, which, lacking conclusive scientific observation, our artist pictures here in imaginative style. (Details on p. 144)